



**Manchester  
Metropolitan  
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**Manchester  
Poetry  
Library**

# A Guide to Accessible Hybrid Literature Festivals

Using Kendal Poetry Festival as Case Study



**nawe** national association of  
writers in education

This guide was commissioned by NAWE

Written and developed by Manchester Poetry Library at Manchester Metropolitan University

With support from Kendal Poetry Festival staff and audiences

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Interviews conducted by Roma Havers – Learning Manager at Manchester Poetry Library

Sources:

Interviews conducted

Events attended by researchers from MPL

Accounts from staff

Kendal Poetry Festival 2022 feedback form and Arts Council evaluation report

Photography by Martin Copley

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# Guide Summary

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We would encourage you to read through the whole document. However, the following section identifies key areas for consideration.

## Hybrid Events and Festivals

- Hybrid online and in person festivals can be successful and sustainable. There are ways of making these financially viable, and the more organisations who integrate online activities into their current practice the more financially viable these will become.
- Many disabled people have been vocal in asking for the continuation of hybrid and online events. Online audiences are present and as important as your in-person audience.
- Take advantage of the possibilities of zoom, Xsplit, OtterAI and social media platforms to optimise the online and access experience for your audience, not all these platforms are fully accessible, but it's helpful to be aware of their features.

## Accessibility

- Audiences identified the hosts of Kendal Poetry Festival as being 'particularly inclusive', centering work they loved with passion, care, and connection. This section also discusses language and better practice.
- The 2022 festival's bursary offer allowed people from low-income backgrounds to attend the festival and brought new audiences to the event. This offer included travel and hotel stay. This guide offers a model for a bursary structure that aims for an enjoyable experience for those who might not be able to access your festival otherwise.
- Although Kendal Poetry Festival did not use a relaxed model, research in the sector suggests that relaxing performances (i.e. Battersea Arts Centre) allows for added accessibility for some audience members.

## Programming

- Kendal Poetry Festival integrated access into the beginning of the process of programming disabled artists, offering a model for how to properly budget for access needs with low admin impact for disabled artists.
- Integrating access into your festival means preparing your artists for technology they will need and performing accessibly before they arrive at the festival. This takes additional admin time but the benefits for audiences were clear.
- The 2022 Festival integrated young and emerging performers into the fabric of every event. Audiences responded positively to hearing from new performers, particularly to the equal treatment of all artists no matter their experience.



## Collaboration and Partnerships

- Kendal Poetry Festival recommended choosing venue and accommodation with accessibility in mind, including writing this into your contracts. This section includes a detailed list of questions to ask of your venues.
- Lots of people have differentiated needs when it comes to communication, particularly at work. Consult with your team about their access needs and follow guidelines for accessible meeting and presentation practice.

## Project Management

- Kendal Poetry Festival advises that significant budget, staff time and planning are needed for accessible practice.
- It is suggested that you build in access consultancy into your bid to follow every aspect of your planning, and formalise this process.
- Including questions on key elements of your access plan into your evaluation process allows you to justify that practice to future funders. Survey all your audiences for impact.

# Introduction and Rationale

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## Why this guide?

During lockdowns in the UK literature events became unprecedentedly accessible to D/deaf and disabled audiences. Since the end of government restrictions many D/deaf and disabled artists have voiced concerns about a movement back towards exclusively in-person events. Across the UK and further, brilliant access work is occurring, much of which is available in the reference guide below. Festivals are adapting and pushing change forward in the sector. It feels vital to acknowledge the work of festivals pushing for hybridity and provisions for D/deaf and disabled artists and audiences, particularly as the progress made during lockdowns in the UK in 2020-2021 feels under threat, despite the continuation of pandemic circumstances for many vulnerable people. (This guide will continue to refer to this time as 'lockdowns' as for many D/deaf and disabled people there has been no 'end of the pandemic').

This guide will particularly focus on accessibility for D/deaf and disabled audiences, performers and staff members, but always with an intersectional approach and with an understanding that radical access work means improving access across all marginalised experience.

The aim is for a clear guide based on practical solutions for how to approach building and learning from what Kendal Poetry Festival experienced, supporting festivals looking to improve their practice. This guide offers a model for working towards accessible practice as ordinary not exceptional in literary festivals.

## Principles of this guide:

This guide draws on the Social model of disability as a framework, which is vital to identifying and addressing environmental, physical, sensory, attitudinal and communication barriers. Beyond this there will be no in-depth justification for why this work is necessary. Others have written about this in greater depth and care, some of which has been linked in the reference guide. Disabled artists and team members were consulted as part of the interview process and the guide itself was written by a member of staff from Manchester Poetry Library who identifies within the disabled community, as commissioned by NAWF with Kendal Poetry Festival reaching to Manchester Poetry Library as a trusted partner organisation, some of which has been linked in the reference guide. Disabled artists and team members were consulted as part of the interview process and the guide itself was written by a member of staff from Manchester Poetry Library who identifies within the disabled community, as commissioned by NAWF with Kendal Poetry Festival reaching to Manchester Poetry Library as a trusted partner organisation.

The ambitions of this guide are to model a sustainable practice of accessibility which prioritises access as ordinary, central and necessary to the future of the arts sector but also as a mode of being full of creative potential. This guide encourages festivals to centre access at the heart of their planning and programming and to prioritise the wellbeing of staff, artists and audiences in their process.

What began as a reflection on Kendal Poetry Festival 2022, opened an enquiry for future ambition. This guide integrates learning both from the festival and other research and models across the sector. The hope is for a guide that feels holistic and acknowledges the depth of thinking that needs to happen for festivals in the planning stages.

### **This is for you if...**

- You are a festival organiser looking to improve / include more accessibility into your planning
- You are thinking of starting a literary festival
- You are interested in Kendal Poetry Festival's work and want to know how they do what they do

### **What this guide is and isn't?**

- It is an example / practical / holistic / specific
- It isn't a catch-all / a model / easily replicable
- A stand in for access experts and consultants

### **Needs and barriers in the wider literature sector**

#### **Some accessible events disabled audiences would like to see more of:**

More deaf and disabled writers' events run by festivals and venues - 73%

More deaf and disabled writers being booked by Festivals and venues - 61%

Reading and performance events for deaf and disabled writers/ poets - 35%

*(Spread the Word Access to Literature Report)*

#### **Barriers to accessing literature opportunities:**

Lack of paid work (for deaf and disabled writers) - 69%

Events/ workshops taking place in inaccessible spaces (online and/or in person) - 63%

It is clear that this work is vital to the sector and that there is a lack of knowledge from organisations, paired with a need and desire for more accessible events and more opportunities for deaf and disabled writers.

## Why consult with access experts?

**Ideally alongside this guide you should also be consulting access experts about the specifics of your project. Here are some questions to get you started when recruiting these:**

- Who are you asking to do this work?
- Are you paying them well and enough for their time?
- Are you asking your disabled artists/friends to do consultancy work rather than artistic work?
- Have you considered the diversity of disabled people's additional needs when choosing your consultant?
- If you are working with a group, how will you make decision making transparent?

## Some Definitions

### What is Disability?

The Equality Act 2010 states that you're disabled if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.

The social model sees 'disability' is the result of the interaction between people living with impairments and an environment filled with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers.

### What is accessibility?

Accessibility is the practice of ensuring there are no barriers that prevent interaction with, or access to, your festival by D/deaf people, people with physical disabilities, neurodiversity, situational disabilities, and socio-economic restrictions. Access needs can be as diverse as experiences of disability. Disabled people are experts on their own experience.

### What does it mean to have an accessible practice?

There are a variety of opinions and perspectives on this question. Below are three perspectives: one from a strategic level, one from a disabled cultural leader and one from a codirector of Kendal Poetry Festival. We encourage you to draw from and consider all three as you approach your own definition. While it is not the whole project, understanding the language you use is an important part of framing why you are doing what you are doing, including examining the assumptions you are making.



‘Inclusivity is about creating safe, welcoming and equitable environments; where everyone is valued no matter their background, identity or circumstances; and where everyone is supported to realise their full creative potential with an increased sense of belonging.’

*Arts Council England Inclusivity and Relevance*

‘Why does inclusion need to be challenged? Well, for many, inclusion speaks to something that feels more like assimilation. So, we all exist in a social structure in which we have claimed identities and performed behaviours that are part of that identity. [...] When we talk about inclusion, it can feel that this term is interchangeable with the notion of widening access. Opening up routes for ‘othered’ people into a pre-existing context. There is an inherent power dynamic and hierarchy. Someone, usually an organisation, must do the including, and in doing so most likely dictates the terms of this inclusion.’

*Kim Simpson*

‘[we aim to] create a holistic model of access which then more naturally extends to performers and to festival staff and our emotional and physical needs: it is no longer a fragmented model of access which defines some people as having access needs - and everyone else as not – [all of us] having minds and bodies which sometimes need support and care! I think we can model this as organisers by being open about our own access needs.’

*Clare Shaw – Codirector of Kendal Poetry Festival*

When beginning your journey towards becoming an inclusive festival, it might be useful to have a checklist of questions to ask yourself about your priorities and the way in which you articulate them to your audiences. Do include your whole team in answering these questions. Here are some questions to get you started:

- Why is accessibility important to you?
- What is your definition of accessibility? You could use some of the above as a starting point.
- What are your organisation’s core values? What is the dominant culture at your organisations? Who sets that culture and what assumptions have they/you made? You might want to refer to Kim Simpson’s article on interpellation and inclusion. How can you challenge or improve your organisation’s approach to ‘inclusion’?
- Who is your audience? How would you articulate your commitment to them? Do you want to make an announcement, or hold an event? Do you want to include your stakeholders in the decision-making?
- Is your definition of inclusivity accessible and clear, could you write a plain-speech version, and an easy read version? Could you put these on your website?
- What are your priorities for this particular festival/event? You might not be able to do everything the first time you run something. Do refer to Kim and Clare’s statement of dealing with anxiety about how much you can achieve.
- What can you do with the budget you have? Try to be realistic and include

everything you can think, including staff time. You might have to consider making changes or cuts to your other programmes. Talk to other organisations that support accessibility, Disability Arts online is a great example, and find out if you can benefit from Access to Work programmes.

- What are your priorities for when you have more money/ more time? Where do you want to be in 5 years' time? Can you make this information available to your audience, so they can see the vision for your future?
- Does your staff / other work reflect these values? This includes freelancers, does your practice reflect your values? Because of the internet and public information, your audiences will have a broader understanding of your work.

**Keep asking yourselves these questions throughout your planning process and refer to your values and priorities as you make complex decisions along the way.**

## What is Kendal Poetry Festival?

Kendal Poetry Festival is a three-day poetry festival, hosting exciting voices from the UK poetry scene, including offers for children, workshops and an exhibition. The fifth Kendal Poetry Festival took place in the town of Kendal in Cumbria in June 2022. After a successful online festival in 2021, the team started planning for a hybrid festival in 2022. The festival welcomed some of the most exciting poets and artists from throughout the UK and beyond. They hosted the 'Painting the Poets' exhibition by Clae Eastgate, and introduced their first Children's Poetry strand with a full day of events for younger audiences. There were plenty of opportunities to get involved in their open mics, workshops and daily writing hours.

Staff:

Clare Shaw – Codirector

Kim Moore – Codirector

Katie Hale – Festival Co-ordinator

Kendal Poetry Festival believes that poetry is for everyone – but recognises that financial difficulties and access needs often prevent low-income and D/deaf and disabled writers from attending poetry festivals. They are committed to widening access and continuing to build on the excellent work they have done over the last five years.

Kim Moore – Codirector:

'We have to build the trust within the disabled poet community, that we are listening, and we're getting better every year.'

## Why Kendal Poetry Festival for this guide?

This guide came about after an event at the annual NAWA Conference in March 2022 (with Hannah Hodgson and Kim Moore) demonstrated a need to capture good practice and learning around accessibility as lockdowns were lifted.

Kendal Poetry Festival 2022 fell at a time when staff from Manchester Poetry Library were able to attend and use their work as a case study, with festival directors committed to accessibility and sharing their practice, and a particularly strong engagement with disability as seen from the statistics below. This is not to say Kendal Poetry Festival is the most accessible festival or that there aren't also learning curves for Kendal Poetry Festival to undergo in the future. We instead aim to use Kendal Poetry Festival as an open case for learning. We are grateful for the generosity and openness of the festival team.

The 2022 Festival had a live audience of 11,000 people (this includes social media interactions and is the figure Arts Council England looks for), 479 who accessed the festival via streaming and an active audience of 1742, and worked with 22 creative practitioners. The festival cost £49,302 to run, with £4,692 set aside to make the festival accessible (although this did not factor in planning, admin time, or costings that weren't specifically for access).

From the feedback forms, this guide was able to gather some demographic data, however this is only representative of the limited number of audience members who took part in this aspect of the evaluation process:

**25% disabled 75% non-disabled or prefer not to say (compared to 22% of the UK population reporting identifying as disabled)**

**80% female 15.5% male 3% non-binary or other**

**89% white 6% non-white 5% did not state**

**Under 30s made up less than 10% of the audiences, with 54% of the audience being aged between 30 and 60, whereas over 60s made up 33% of the audiences.**

It is clear from this data that Kendal Poetry Festival's considerable efforts towards accessibility for disabled audience members is reflected in the representation of those willing to self-identify as disabled on their feedback forms. As well as showing a level of accessibility this also reflects a level of trust from an audience willing to disclose this information.

# A Case for Hybridity

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## What is a hybrid festival?

A hybrid festival is one that exists both online and in-person, this benefits both those who would struggle to access in-person events and those for whom in-person events are a preference. Online events became much more popular during lockdown and many people were able to access programmes of work they hadn't before. Technologies now make hybrid events relatively easy and low-cost, and the rewards are well worth the extra planning and funding. Additionally, it makes sense for ticket sales – you can sell more tickets and the limit of online audiences is not restricted by room space.

Katie Hale, Festival Coordinator:

'Maybe one or two of the people who are online might have come in person if online wasn't an option. But the vast, vast majority wouldn't, either because of accessibility in terms of health or disability needs. But also, people who are carers, people who just live really far away and people who don't have transport. There are people who are parents and have their kids playing in the other room. There are so many people who benefit from an accessible hybrid festival.'



Clare Shaw, Codirector:

‘The actual act of getting on a train and going to a festival and being around people for days and staying in a hotel, it’s so far out of the financial, practical, physical and emotional reach of so many people that putting it online completely changes it.’

Audience member:

‘As someone with mobility issues, in the past I have been unable to attend events like this excellent festival. I am dreading being isolated again in the future if suddenly all events go back to being held in the real world and organisers forget all about those of us left abandoned in the virtual world.’

## What is good livestreaming?

Livestreaming is the practice of broadcasting an in-person event directly online. It is not videoing the event and putting it up later or live-tweeting or otherwise updating the internet with the event, although these are worthwhile alternatives if you cannot afford full hybridity. While you can livestream directly from a phone to something like ‘Facebook live’ or to ‘YouTube live’ working with cameras and professional equipment allows for a better quality of video. Livestreaming to Zoom allows for the online experience to feel like ‘an event’. If you can live-stream all events you can give a hybrid festival experience, rather than it feeling like an add-on.

For a high quality livestream you might want to consider investing in a full technical set-up including a production team. This cost up to £400 per event at Kendal Poetry Festival but the quality is worthwhile if you can afford it. There are lots of organisations that now specialise in live-streaming events. You might want to consider a venue that regularly livestreams events and can include this in their pricing.

### Tech you will need if working alone:

- Two devices i.e. laptops
- Microphones for your performers – ideally linked to speakers
- A camera that can be linked to a laptop. Ideally two means you can have a second camera and device to point to your BSL interpreter
- Large screen for in-person audiences to see virtual performances and feel connected to the online audience
- Two business zoom accounts
- Xsplit can also be useful – this can allow you to input two cameras from into one zoom account

### Questions to ask yourself:

- Is our sound set up high quality?
- Have you placed your cameras where your online audience will feel included?
- Are you livestreaming all your events, including exhibitions and workshops?
- Is your venue well suited to livestreaming?
- Are there clear places to place cameras that allow for sightlines for both audiences in-person and online?
- Is there stage with space for a large screen, or projection for the in-person to see artists who are performing online?
- Is there a space for the member of staff to be seated with the laptop out of the way? The festival in 2022 used a venue with unused balcony seating from where the staff with the laptop could be seated secluded and with a great view.

### What can you do on Zoom?

Many of us have become relatively comfortable with the platform that is Zoom and attended events on zoom ourselves, but here are suggestions for running fantastic hybrid events and workshops.

Kendal Poetry Festival suggests... using Zoom meeting not Zoom Webinar. This allows the audience to see each other, use the chat and be part of the event the way you would at an in-person event. Ask your audience to put themselves on mute during readings and most people will – they want to hear too! Zoom bombing has significantly dropped by 2023 and is less of a risk.

...always having a member of your staff sitting with the laptop as 'Zoom host' (use a work account that you all have access to and have a back-up laptop nearby if you need to switch hosts quickly!) This person can greet the audience members and respond to questions in the chat in real time, and this makes the online audience feel welcome. Ideally all your in-person hosts should at some point greet the online audience before the event or during the break, come to the laptop and say hi, you could tell them something you are excited for or ask where they are calling in from.

...using the time before the events to ask audience members where they are, show them the room and give online audiences a sense of what's going on. You, you might want to give visual descriptions of your hosts, speakers and spaces in this time.

...making use of the chat box! An added bonus of online events is you can keep chatting without disturbing anyone. Encourage audience members to share what they think, offer prompts if they are quiet.

...offering workshops on using Zoom before your festival to make the online experience more accessible to people less comfortable with online platforms.

Kendal Poetry Festival suggests...preparing your artists and your audience for zoom performances. Talk to them about how they can make use of the camera if they are zooming in, make sure all your artists know and acknowledge that there will be an online audience too. You could also offer for artists to prerecord their performance although this does lose a sense of liveness.

Zoom chat can be inaccessible for screen readers. If you are saving and sharing the content of zoom recordings and transcripts you need to get permission from everyone who speaks or is seen to share this.

## Case Study:

Joelle Taylor performed from home on the Friday night of Kendal Poetry Festival 2022. There was a train strike, and she was unable to make it to Kendal. It was noted by audiences that it was a particularly strong zoom performance, with an old-fashioned visible microphone and clearly lit, with an incredibly engaging performance that factored what was visible of her body on screen. Even those who were not familiar with Joelle's work, remembered the performance for the effort into the online performance.

## How do I approach transcribing and accessible captioning?

### Why do it?

- Lots of people benefit from captioning and transcribing especially with literature, when you don't want to miss a thing!
- It makes your events accessible to D/deaf people as well as those who have challenges processing information. Many people use subtitles for a variety of reasons.
- Open captions are not accessible to screen readers, closed captions can be but need to be checked for speed and accessibility of font and size. Check if captions are read automatically and correctly by screen readers. Test both desktop and mobile platforms.
- Consider exploring audio description too (this is a service that allows blind people to also receive narration of visual and non-verbal information, this can be fed through a separate pair of headphones provided for audience members. Continued visual descriptions from performers (see accessible performing section) can be an alternative if you can't manage audio description service as well as captioning.

42% of 139 audience members surveyed found live captioning very or somewhat useful.

### What service should I use?

Otter AI is the best reasonably priced automated captioning service at around £16 a month. If you also have funding for BSL that's brilliant, but not every deaf person knows BSL and not everyone who benefits from captions is deaf.

## What is live captioning?

Kendal Poetry Festival also invested in live captioners as poetry is particularly difficult to caption well. Live-captioners, are people paid to transcribe what is said live, for a festival you would need several captioners as this is labour intensive work. Paying people to live caption can be expensive, it is worth getting a quote from an organisation early in your planning process. For live captioning you need a visible screen for the captions to appear, this can also be embedded into zoom, so both in person and online audiences can see them.

Kendal Poetry Festival suggests...working closely with your live captioners so they are familiar with poetry which will be shared.

...combining this with screen-sharing, as the layout of poetry is especially important for D/deaf poetry audiences as it offers a three-dimensional experience of language.

## A case study for screensharing:

91% of 139 audience members surveyed found screensharing very or somewhat useful.

Poems can be challenging things to caption, and there can be additional visual choices to poem layouts which it can benefit a reader to see. During Kendal Poetry Festival Kim and Clare chose to screenshare word documents of the poems being read on zoom throughout the festival. This took additional admin time and required clear communication with artists to send their poems and setlists in advance. The benefits were clear to see: many audience members noted that it enhanced the experience, making it better than in-person. In Victoria Adukwei Bulley's reading, the screensharing allowed audience members to see additional writing choices like slashes or crossed out words which wouldn't have been present in an audio only performance.

An excerpt from zoom chat function during Victoria's reading:

From [redacted] to Everyone 03:54 PM

I'm so glad you did - it's really great to read alongside. Like the crossings out, like [ ], and even when words have been changed, that's also really fascinating

From [redacted] to Everyone 03:56 PM

all your extra labour is very appreciated - so fantastic to read along

**Top tips: It might be helpful to have this written into artist contracts and choose poets who support this process. Make sure to store the poems somewhere only you and the relevant people have access, such as a google drive. The poems should ideally be in one document in the right order so the zoom host can scroll. You'll need to gather these poems for live captioning anyway. This is particularly admin heavy, see PROJECT MANAGEMENT for more details on administration workload.**





## How do I include an online audience and performers?

### Case Study- Daniel Sluman

'I performed another festival last year and I did a virtual performance, the actual whole event was in a room somewhere with people there attending, and someone who I was reading with was there in person reading, and then I was zooming in. I couldn't see there's a camera there, but I couldn't see any of your audience. So I had literally no contact no sense of looking at people's body language and working out timings and things like that. And I had no feedback as well because I couldn't hear anything and it felt really, really kind of alien, and it didn't feel connected at all'

Kendal Poetry Festival suggests...not referring to in person experience as 'real life', being online is just as real, the online audience is there too but they are also where they are! Kendal Poetry Festival likes to use the phrase 'zoomland' but you might want to think about something special for your audiences.

...describing the room and things that happen in the room to audiences, even things that feel small. E.g. 'there are so many hands up!' It really helps people feel included.

...making use of your intervals, chat to your audience the way you would in-person. Open the zoom room a bit early, or leave it open afterwards, this helps build the atmosphere. This can be challenging if you have back to back performances so consider factoring this into your programming.

*Audience members noted feeling 'lonely' after the zoom closed, particularly with more moving performances. This is challenging to combat if you need the zoom for another event, and the hosts need a break too. Perhaps a solution might be having a designated online host, who can guide online audiences to another zoom space for debrief or a chat function that can continue out of the space.*

Kendal Poetry Festival suggests... making sure your zoom hosts are comfortable acting as engaging, facilitators of the online space. Have a rehearsal – test it out in the space beforehand see how it feels!

**But what does that mean? An example:**

'Like chatting at the back of the hall, but it was a really lovely community kind of feel'

*Katie Hale – Festival Coordinator*

Katie Hale was Zoom host for many of the events Manchester Poetry Library attended. Katie's role in the 2022 festival was Festival Coordinator. Katie opened the zoom early for online audiences to settle in, keep their cameras and mics on. She engaged people she had seen at previous events to discuss what they'd been up to in between, commented on where people looked like they were, and how they were feeling for the upcoming event. The conversation was light and carefully echoed the kind of chat you'd have when in your seats before an in-person event. Katie kept an eye on the chat throughout, responding to people's questions and encouraging people to share what they thought in the chat. In the interval she showed us the room, and mentioned Kim was coming over, Kim expressed that she was so excited to see us. There were audience members requesting that they would have felt even more included had there been a space after the events to discuss together and for more challenging readings to emotionally support each other.

## How can I make the most of social media?

As well as being a brilliant marketing tool, social media is a fantastic way to claim a presence digitally beyond livestreaming. Remember that with a hybrid event you don't have to be limited by location, do connect with community groups or audiences who might be interested in your event – even internationally!

**Platforms to consider:** Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok

*Remember some platforms require a different kind of liveness than others and have different audiences. Social media can be inaccessible to some people including but not limited to visually impaired people and learning disabled people, regardless of the accessibility features. What platforms do your audiences use and how do they use them? E.g. some young people now use TikTok as a search engine but it requires the user to keep up with its trends, whereas the majority of people use*

*twitter for work and might pass over event suggestions. While many no longer use Facebook, lots of people find it most useful for events. Some people use Eventbrite to search for events and even subscribe to organisation's Eventbrite. Write this into your evaluation and data practice.*

### **Their accessibility features:**

- Instagram: Instagram offers an automatic captioning service; you can also add visual descriptions under videos and images. Stories offer more temporary images and videos, during the festival.
- Twitter: if there is text involved in your images, it's suggested you have a secondary tweet on a thread that has the same text so that those with screen readers can clearly read the text. Auto captions are available on all videos. Capitalize the first letter of each word in hashtags to make them screen-reader friendly. (Example: #DisabilityInclusion vs. #disabilityinclusion) Screen readers read the names of emojis, so make sure these don't obscure your meaning.
- Facebook: Instagram, Twitter and Facebook all offer an Alt Text option, where you can add your alternative text for screen readers. You can add your own captions to videos but you have to upload your own.
- TikTok: Caption background music and lyrics as needed if important for video comprehension (mostly important for TikTok, Instagram Reels). Make sure that captions are not covered by platform content (i.e. TikTok or Instagram Reels side panel or Instagram stories message field). Use content warnings for videos that include either in the caption. (Example: "CW- strobes, flashing lights"). Additionally, include warnings for loud videos or videos that change volume/ tone quickly.
- In general check that you are using accessible fonts and colour combinations. Include high-colour contrast for captions so that they can be easily read.

**What to document:** All aspects of your festival, you can live-tweet events, include video tours of exhibitions and spaces, behind the scenes content, videos with audience feedback, call outs for people from home. If you don't have capacity yourselves considering offering social media takeovers to enthusiastic audience members and volunteers – remember to write a brand guideline if you don't want to have to approve every post. Don't forget to have someone keep an eye on social media DMs during the festival itself, this might be the way audience members try to contact you. In general a unique and human-focused social media presence works better than being too branded.

**Top tip: remember your digital audiences in your social media presence, try not to create inside jokes that only in person people know. If you are including your audiences in the making of the content include online people too.**

# Inclusion

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## What is inclusive hosting?

It's difficult to describe what makes an inclusive host, but so many people interviewed during this process described Kendal Poetry Festival in this way, it felt worthwhile to interrogate closely. As with access more generally, the aim is not to reach a point of 'fully inclusive hosting' but there are clear steps that can be made to become more inclusive.

'It all feels so close, the space and its safeness you have created- charged with emotion and breathing too. Poetry as heart song expression and as a community forming force.'

*Becky Swain MPL Director*

'They were just so emotionally invested, like they were so moved by everyone's words and they've clearly chose the poets for a reason. And I think they gave a bit of a back story with why they chose that poet and what it meant to them that really helped because I didn't know any of the poets really'

*Audience Member*

How do we define this kind of language: welcoming, kind, emotionally invested, inclusive? How do we learn to become these things when by their definition we think we should be already? These are all modes of being that can be learned and interpreted in ways that are personal and individual. They are also skills that can be identified and developed, some of the below tips may or may not be more challenging for some people, particularly those who find interpersonal and social interaction difficult. A truly accessible approach acknowledges the challenges of interpersonal communication for all, including those who outwardly appear particularly good at it.

### Here are some key impressions that Kendal Poetry Festival hosts gave:

- A real passion for the performances
- Time to talk individually and intimately with their audience members
- A sense of personality and openness about their own lives
- A sincerity and willingness to show emotional responses to the work

**Top tip: maybe your directors aren't the best equipped for hosting, have an open discussion about who offers the skills needed for inclusive hosting. Instead of feeling unsure, become a team that values the labour of emotional engagement regardless of job title and consider those people for public-facing roles.**

## How to approach content warnings?

Content warnings can be a useful way of safeguarding your audience and giving them the opportunity to remove themselves from triggering spaces. You can never fully predict what will be a trigger for someone who has had a traumatic experience, but there are some common ones which you could let your audience know are coming. It is best to be in communication with your performers about this process as they may have their own methods of communicating, and feelings about how their work is described.

If a performer does not want to trigger warn at all it might be useful to do a general guidance that anyone can leave at any time at the beginning of each event, and just let your audience know you won't be trigger warning individual performances. If you are screensharing you have the added benefit of having seen the poems before the event and you might want to advice your performers as to how they might let the audience know what is coming in advance. This is not censorship; it is the same practice of putting an age rating on a film.

There are also many people who find trigger warnings othering for their own reasons, considering them to prioritise normative understandings of what is shocking or distressing. Keep this in mind, your care of your audience isn't finished with warnings alone. This is just one tool, to be used alongside other opportunities to be in communication with your audience.

## What do audiences need to know in advance?

If there are audience behaviour expectations let people know. Especially for neurodivergent people it's important not to assume that 'unspoken rules' are known by everyone. Think carefully about what is expected of literary audiences. Identify which of those rules you want to encourage in your space and what you think aren't needed here – make those rules clear to your audiences, let them know what will happen if they don't meet those expectations and what support you offer if they need to remove themselves from your space, or if you need to ask them to leave.

## How do I provide relaxed performances?

'Relaxed performances offer a warm welcome to people who find it difficult to follow the usual conventions of theatre behaviour. [...] Many other people may choose to attend a relaxed performance, either as an access requirement or because they like the inclusive environment. Relaxed performances take a laid-back approach to noises or movement coming from the audience. They give everyone permission to relax and respond naturally. Many people feel that relaxed performances offer a more dynamic theatrical experience, which benefits everyone.'

*Tourette's Hero definition of Relaxed Performance*



There's a lot to learn from the theatre sector about relaxed performances (look at Tourette's Hero's FAQ for a detailed how to), but here are some things to consider when thinking about relaxed literary events.

- Literary events are traditionally about as unrelaxed as performances get, audiences anticipate that they will have to sit still and be quiet for an hour or more. This is simply not accessible to many D/deaf and disabled people. Relaxed performances allow for audiences to stay, to take part and to hear the work that is meaningful to them.
- Who does it benefit? This can include: Learning disabled and neurodivergent people (encompassing ADHD, autism, other neurological conditions, Tourette's) and those with young children or babies.

**So you're going to try out a relaxed performance:**

- Make sure the offer is clear on all your marketing and pre-show information. Announce at the beginning of the event too, so everyone in the room is on the same page.
- Make sure you have a procedure for how to handle audience complaints.

- Adjust your sound and lighting design to prioritise sensory needs and provide ear defenders if you anticipate a particularly loud performance. Volume is one aspect of sensory difference but the kind of sound can also be relevant. Provide this information in advance and if you can record the audio as samples for anyone who wants to hear it before this show this can be useful.
- Don't make assumptions about who is or isn't disabled as many impairments are invisible and when relaxing an event or a venue, it is best practice to not make assumptions about who is or isn't allowed to take advantage of the benefits.

### **The big questions:**

- What would a relaxed festival look like?
- How can we make more space for different ways of listening, different ways of being present, and different understanding of being disturbed?
- How can we better prepare our performers for the resilience of meeting audiences where they're at? How can we support our performers, too, to relax?

## **How do we ensure our festival is open to those on low incomes?**

We spoke with a self-employed creative, a recipient of one of Kendal Poetry Festival's 'opening doors' bursaries. Their bursary included free tickets to all events as well as free accommodation and travel to the festival. They would not have been able to attend the festival without this bursary.

They said:

'It was empowering, the fact that the opportunity was there for someone like me and when I was successful, it gave me a confidence boost. I think, yeah, they believe in me and believe in my work and believe by me going to this festival that will open up opportunities and improve my writing and that I'm somebody that's worthy of that happening to.'

Kim Moore – Codirector:

'We built up over quite a few years to achieve this level of bursary - the first year, I think we offered free tickets, second year free tickets and accommodation etc.'

There might be several different ways to approach bursaries, including providing one bursary for one person that covers everything, or multiple smaller bursaries valid as part of an ongoing. It depends on what you wish to achieve.

### **Some things to factor into your bursary offer:**

- Don't ask for any information you don't need, respect people's privacy and dignity. Don't ask for proof of low-income, trust people.
- Structure the fact that you'll have bursaries into your engagement work, make sure the people who will value this opportunity see it and know it's for them.
- Include all aspects of the festival where they might need to pay for something – this includes food especially if you are not near anywhere where you can buy cheap food.
- One bursary member interviews suggested that they would have loved if they were welcomed when they arrived, and introduced to each other, but this may be personal preference.

**Kendal Poetry Festival Top Tip: it costs you nothing to offer extra free online tickets, consider adding discretionary ones for anyone that approaches that would like to come but couldn't afford it.**

### **How do we factor in festival accessibility into a year-long programme?**

Every participant spoken to had met and formed a personal connection with Kim or Clare in the year or two years leading up to Kendal Poetry Festival. This speaks to the depth and breadth of Kim and Clare's development of the network and community across the years leading up to festivals, where people who have attended one of their workshops feel connected enough to attend their festival.

#### **What does this do?**

- Helps build trust for your events
- Makes you identifiable faces to your audiences
- Identifies potential bursary recipients
- Shows that your access values are year-long not just so you can sell more tickets.

### **Case Study: Audience Wellbeing**

S attended the fully virtual Kendal Poetry Festival in 2021 and then began attending readings with 'Go to the Poets' –funded by Wordsworth Grasmere a project which Codirector Kim Moore is attached – and booked again to attend Kendal Poetry Festival this year. S noted that their mental health conditions general prevent them from attending festivals and large events but had built a relationship of trust across the year where they felt Kendal Poetry Festival would be a safe space for them.



They said:

‘They asked ‘Are you OK? Are you managing?’ And that’s. Nobody’s ever done that for me. That’s my home now and I will come back, and I will make sure I will do whatever I can to maintain that because that is worth keeping hold of and that’s worth nurturing and that I think is the key to all of this.’

Because of the care taken to make S feel safe in the space Kendal Poetry Festival have an audience member for much longer in S.

## How do we best provide for intersectional experiences?

### What is intersectionality?

As we’re approaching making provisions for marginalised groups it’s important to remember that individual people don’t generally exist in a singular box, and many people exist within more than one marginalised experience. An intersectional approach to accessibility considers these experiences.

### Top tips:

- Avoid making assumptions about disability / needs. Remember not all disabilities are visible and not everyone who might benefit from provisions would identify as disabled.
- Provide ample opportunities to encourage people to tell you their needs but remember that not everyone knows what they need, and it can be a privilege in itself to feel confident articulating access needs.
- Partner with organisations that work with your target audiences.
- Ask yourself ‘are my provisions for D/deaf disabled audiences accessible to working class D/deaf and disabled people/ disabled people of colour / queer D/deaf and disabled people?’ If you don’t know, invest time and money into finding out.

## Case Study – Guerilla Poetry

‘The Guerrilla poetry went up all over Kendal, so we worked with a poet called Melissa Davis, who created an installation in the shopping centre, over the course of the festival, so that was all live-tweeted and put on Instagram, kind of as it was going on. So just to kind of create that sort of cross fertilisation between the audience’s a bit. There is a lot of accessibility built in, people can enjoy it at their own pace in their own time.’

Katie Hale – Festival Coordinator

### Questions to ask yourself:

- Think about the role your city/ town plays in your festival. If people are visiting your city, do they get to know it? Do the locals know your festival is happening and feel included?
- What could a free offer look like for your festival?
- Are you remembering to include your free offers in your social media plans?

## How do we develop good relationships with disabled audiences?

### Questions to ask yourself:

- Have you acknowledged that you understand how D/deaf and disabled people have been treated historically including during the pandemic and after it? Disabled people are diverse, and includes so many experiences, an awareness of the diversity is vital.
- How do your audiences know they can trust you? What have you done to prove your commitment to them?
- What advocacy do you do for disabled people outside of your project planning? Do you know what challenges the community is currently facing?
- Are you prepared to be met with anger and criticism? What are you doing to support your staff to respond well to criticism?
- Offer free tickets to PAs and carers, and translators, and make it clear audience members can bring guide dogs. Make sure the hotels, travel services etc you are signposting audiences to are accessible, check yourselves and signpost. A website that says it is fully accessible is often not the case; build trust with your audiences that you care about their holistic experience of the festival.
- Offer touch tours and familiarisation tours before your festival begins. This may well be able to be written into a bid if it can be justified as helpful to your artists. The Dan Daw Show offered a really comprehensive offer which is a great example.
- Use National Theatre's [access list model](#) this allows for you to collect audience access needs data and store it, this reduces the number of times disabled people have to fill in access forms. This register should be encrypted with its own confidentiality policy, but is very useful if you have a strong returning audience.
- Not every offer you make has to be practical and serious, so much of what is on offer to disabled people is the bare minimum, consider how you can make your access provisions as creative and exciting as your festival programming.

## Case Study: Festival Survival Kit

'The Festival Survival Kit contain various things that will help people quote, 'survive' during the festival. There's a pamphlet of poems by the young poets. And there's a badge. We have sponsorship from Kendal for tea and coffee. We have that there's a forest tea bag, and a Kendal mint cake, from Romney's. There's a piece of Kendal there, even if you're not there. It's kind of like a goodie bag really. And last year, [online festival 2021], that became really important, because it was something that we posted out to people and it just gave people that that feeling of being physically involved in the festival, even when everyone was so dispersed kind of nationally and internationally. We wanted that as well to be a way of tying the in-person audience and the digital audience together.'

Katie Hale – Festival Coordinator

The Festival Survival Kits were personal, specific, fun and compassionate – these are some great guidelines for designing something for your festival.

## How do you approach improving your practice after criticism?

So you've received your feedback on how you could do better, you've maybe even dealt with challenging feelings, anger or disappointment from your audiences. We all have an obligation to listen, change and improve the way we do things, however difficult it can be to be confronted with criticism. Everyone deals with this differently, but not always appropriate to share with everyone, especially on public social media, with the disabled person who brought it to your attention, or other audiences members. Knowing who in your organisation, or wider network is a trusted confident for more challenging feelings of your own, is important to have.

Remember that there's a real emotional cost to living in a society in which additional needs and differences are presented as problems or a burden, and that asking for changes or for your needs to be met can be emotionally very difficult, especially if it is a regular occurrence. Your ability to response affirmatively, with understanding and show you have listened, can make this a positive experience. There are training models that can support staff to develop resilience to criticism which may be worth investing in, if your team members find this particularly challenging.

Step 1: The fact that someone has felt comfortable enough to give you feedback is really good news. They trust you, they care about what you want to be doing and they are invested in getting involved. However, if someone uses offensive language, violence or comments on anything personal about you or your colleagues, then you have the right to set a boundary. Remain calm and let them know that because of the manner of their communication you won't be able to continue to engage with them. There is a difference between someone being upfront or blunt and abuse – some people find managing tone, or conforming to societal norms of politeness inaccessible. If you aren't sure, ask if this was their intention.

Step 2: Their feedback was given to you in a way you find fair, but you find it difficult to respond, you feel guilty, or you feel you don't have the power to do anything. It's helpful to have a bit of a checklist for yourself before you decide you can't do it:

- Is the resistance coming from an emotional place rather than whether you practically can do it?
- Is there something else you do that feels less important that you could transfer the time or funds to rectifying this problem?
- Do you fully understand what is being asked of you? Do you know what the steps would be to make this change? Is there more research you could do to understand the request better?

If you know the answers to all of these, and you still feel that you can't make these changes right away, here's a suggestion of a response:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for taking the time to feed this back to our team, we've taken your suggestions seriously and discussed them as a team, unfortunately due to (limited funding/lack of staff time/ more people requesting the opposite / some other reason) we aren't currently able to make these changes you suggested. We are currently seeking funding which we hope to include this which we hope to gain on X date.

Please do keep in touch and we will let you know when these changes have been made.

# Programming

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## What should be considered when choosing performers?

Kendal Poetry Festival22 Audience Member:

'I loved the way Kim and Clare were openly moved by the poems and poets, they did not talk just about the techniques but honestly about the power of poetry to move people, and just tell it as it is.'

Step 1: Audiences can tell when you love the artists you have booked. Come together as a team and discuss what you love and why.

Step 2: Research and attend events in your sector, who is being booked, why are they being booked, what's missing?

Step 3: What are your biases? What is missing amongst your selections?

Step 4: Are your choices representative of the audiences you want to bring in? Can you articulate why your audiences will love this performer?

Step 5: Do your choices reflect your values? Do they reflect a wide range of experiences?

**You might want to make a commitment to a number of your performers who are D/disabled, for example 20% this is easier to show you have met than something generic like 'more' or 'some'. Remember that representation should always be a part of your programming and an intersectional, diverse programme is always best.**

Example:

Clare Shaw on choosing Jane Burns:

'Jane Burns was a poet who I think kind of possibly struggles to find her place on the festival circuit because of their neurodivergence which meant that she was just about the most popular poet at the festival because of who she is and her neurodivergence being part of that, you know, being a festival where that's going to be absolutely embraced and not mean that you're out on the margins and feel that you're not one of the big guys.'

## What does supporting disabled performers look like?

Kendal Poetry Festival 22 audience member:

'I am disabled and a wheelchair user and unable to travel very far. The dedication of Kim Moore and Clare Shaw who were at every event I attended. It was good to see disabled poets in the spotlight.'

Kendal Poetry Festival wanted to invite Daniel Sluman along to perform at the festival. Daniel is a disabled poet who would have struggled to attend the weekend without additional support. Daniel has been steadily growing a career, after winning prizes, where he is invited to more festivals. As a poet, this can be a much more stable and regular income, Daniel had found that because of access needs he was generally spending his festival fee on travel and additional accommodation.

Kim Moore on booking Daniel Sluman:

'With Daniel getting into the festival, we put extra funding in for him to come for an extra night so that he had time to rest because otherwise he wouldn't have been able to travel on the day, and then go home the day after, it's just not possible. But you can only think of those things like I wouldn't think of that as an able-bodied person.'

As festival directors I think you need to start putting that in the first email to say what accessibility needs do you have? We really want to work with you to try and make you have a good experience. And I think that goes a long way.'

### Learning points:

- State in first contact what access you can offer and the fee.
- Provide information on the expectations you have, the layout of the venue and location in general, how long they can stay. Disabled people can spend hours researching places they are going, if you can take on some of this labour and be in dialogue with artists.
- If you can book your artist for more than one day at the festival, these means they can stay longer, allowing for more rest time in situ rather than having two travel days in a row.
- Offer travel for personal assistants, support workers, partners or family members, if the disabled artists requires or would benefit from additional human support to travel or access the festival. Daniel also noted that he is carer for his partner as well as her being carer to him. Many disabled people also have caring responsibilities and need support to bring the people they care for.
- Ensure that you ask every artist what they require in terms of accessibility and support. People are experts in their own conditions and access requirements, do not make assumptions about what someone may or may not require.
- Any access requests you offer or decide upon, make sure these are written into artist's contracts. On every contract include a clause that artists are choosing to perform at a festival committed to disabled access and that the performer is committing to taking part in any access features of your festival.
- Ask for access riders / support writers to write one. See reference list for access rider guide.

Daniel Sluman

'I'm aware that a lot of the things I'm talking about some organizers of some poetry events and festivals might think, well, we can't afford to have X person or Y person here. Are you budgeting with the assumption that each person is able bodied? You know, there is a monetary value potentially attached to that, but there's also a cultural kind of dividend that's going come in return'

## How do we talk to other artists about access?

- Write your accessibility values into artist contracts. If you are expecting more from them pay them more!
- Make sure all roles are clear, what the expectations are. Your artists might also be unsure about the 'rules' of festivals. If you are aiming for a relaxed performance let your performers know they can relax too! A relaxed approach to communication about arrival times or expectations can be much less relaxing for a performer.
- Prepare your artists for performing at online and hybrid events, you might want to offer zoom training for workshops.
- Factor in extra skills needed when choosing poets or pay freelancers to do appropriate training including running accessible workshops, or performing for relaxed audiences, including performing at a pace and clarity appropriate for captioners.
- Ask your performers to introduce themselves with their name, pronouns and a visual description for blind and visually impaired audience members. You should also do this as hosts. Visual Description helps blind and visually impaired people get a broader sense of the experience, you might want to describe the space as well. This should be a short concise descriptions which include brief details about themselves such as distinguishing characteristics like hair colour, race/ ethnicity, gender, clothing, and background details. It's worth acknowledging that these are details that can be more complicated for some people, and no one has to disclose their gender identity, race or any detail they don't want to on stage, but this a practice that equalises the experience for visually impaired people, giving them information that seeing people in the audience have just by watching.

## How to include the voices of emerging artists?

As part of the programme for Kendal Poetry Festival<sup>22</sup> Kim and Clare invited Kim's group 'Dove Cottage Young Poets' to perform as part of the events. Dove Cottage Young Poets is a free writing group for 14-21 year olds based in Cumbria. The poets performed their work on the same programme as the professional poets, in between more experienced performers but treated with the same respect. The young poets were very well received and were offered the opportunity to see where they could progress to and showcase their work.

**Top Tips:**

- Add newer emerging poets to your programme, treat them with the same level of respect as your more experienced performers.
- Partner with an organisation in the area where your festival will take place that supports emerging writers – if there isn't one, what can you do to bring support for young writers into your programme?





- Run an open mic as part of your programme – lots of your audience will be writers, let them showcase their work and how inspired they feel! Make sure your open mic also uses your captioning methods and is as accessible as other events, including how you sign up.
- In what other ways are you supporting ways into the arts? Could you offer free tickets to emerging critics? Or have a young producers programme?
- Whatever you do make sure it feels foregrounded and integrated into your festival, those events shouldn't be cheaper, less supported, or rushed. For example, if all your senior staff are in attendance for the readings make sure they are available to come to the open mic etc.

## How to introduce audiences to new work?

Kendal Poetry Festival22 Audience Member:

'It has changed the way I feel about festivals as previously I've felt like an outsider, as if I didn't know enough to be there or a festival was something other people (people not like me) did. I've found here I have been truly welcomed, that I was part of a community of people and poetry'

Kendal Poetry Festival22 did a fantastic job at introducing their audiences to the festival poets before they were at the event. Here are a couple of particularly successful methods and additional ideas.

### Workshops

Invite your poets to run a workshop before their event; or run a writing workshop where you use their poems. Kim and Clare's writing hours every morning of the festival, offered a close look at poems that would be performed later in the day. This gave a window into how that poet worked and at least one poem that you really understood.

### Top tips for an accessible workshops:

- If you are reading poems together – don't forget to also screenshare them
- Provide captioning for your workshops too
- Like all other events, clearly identify on all marketing if this workshop has a BSL interpreter, a hearing loop or any other access features.
- Prepare your workshop facilitators and check over their plans
- If it's longer than an hour, offer a break in the middle
- Make sure anyone speaking is mic'ed, it might be better to offer a workshop where nobody except the host speaks.

Kendal Poetry Festival noted that hybrid workshops are much more labour intensive than in person or solely online, while you need someone at the laptop making sure you can screenshare, answer questions and attend to online audience. You also need an additional person in the room, checking door tickets, and anything that comes up for in person participants. As an alternative Clare suggested Verve Poetry Festival Model of running the same workshop twice once online and one in person – perhaps at a different time in the festival.

### Extra ideas

- Could you ask your performers to write a description specific to your audience. Think about what tone you want to get across? What do your audiences want to know?
- Share your performers' work ahead of the festival. Showcase their other projects and events in advance. This is always more time intensive than you think. Factor in both marketing and admin times. There are ways of paying for social media ads that advertise your work further.
- Get your poets to record videos introducing themselves to the festival
- Make book buying/ lending easier ahead of and during the festival. You could partner with a local library or bookseller.
- Encourage your poets to stay for the whole festival so they become a known presence for the audience, pay them a weekend fee.

# Collaboration and Partnerships

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## What should we communicate with venues about access?

This is a fantastic stage to involve any access consultants, they might well get involved in site visits and liaising with more detailed questions. Shape Arts for example run access audits of venues to give you a sense of what is possible to change at several layers, personally tailored.

### **Kendal Poetry Festival's Top Tips:**

- Communicate as early as possible about your access plans.
- Not all venues are capable of providing all the best access provisions, and you may have other priorities that are very important to your festival or are closely connected with a location e.g. Kendal Poetry Festival needed to take place in Kendal! Whatever you are able to provide make sure it's clear and transparent on your website, so people can make their own decisions.
- An access consultant come scope out the venue, to check what needs to be changed or adapted.
- Write your access agreements, including any changes that need to be made, into contracts.
- Think about local amenities, are there affordable places to buy food nearby, else consider providing a food service. Are there accessible and gender-neutral toilets at your venue? If your venue doesn't have gender neutral toilets, we suggest asking your venue if you can relabel a set of toilets for your event with a sign over the door saying Gender Neutral toilets.
- If you are focusing on D/deaf disabled audiences, consider a venue with more than one disabled toilet. Not all disabled toilets have all the possible access provisions, it's possibly worth having more details on your booking system or an image.
- Is there somewhere for guide dogs to take a walk? Is there an outside area that's separate from the smoking area?
- It's useful to have a time out space in the venue, somewhere you could make soft and not overstimulating, this should ideally not be overtaken with anything else, and while it could double as a prayer room do consider having more than one space.

- Navigation can be challenging for disabled people for all sorts of reasons. If you are moving between venues, make sure your access consultant also checks that the streets are easy to navigate, and add your own signage if needed. You could liaise with local groups/councils to support this. Do consider mapping out how close the hotels and stations are to the venue, and make sure there are good public transport links. You might want to provide an audio description or video of routes to buildings, including things like pavement width and wheelchair accessibility, quality of roads and parking
- Make sure your signage around the building is really clear in large fonts, sans serif with light backgrounds, make sure you have volunteers on hand to support that people know they can turn to. We'd suggest making sure your signage is Royal National Institute of Blind People compliant.
- While accessibility-wise it can be helpful to host everything in the same building. For some people being in the same space all day can be overwhelming and under-stimulating. Consider having some variety, even include outdoor options or good breaks between events. If you are in the space the same day, make sure your venue know to be extra careful with dusting and cleaning, for those with allergies and for those with additional vulnerability to covid.
- Is the space appropriate for those with sensory needs? Sensory needs can include being sensitive to bright, white lighting, the quality of sound, the volume of sound, flashing lights, temperature and smell etc. You should also take into account spaces outside the performance space, if your breakout space has very bright lights and beeping equipment for example, it's not an appropriate break out space. Anything that you find annoying could be unbearable to someone with sensory sensitivity. The society for Disability Studies conference has a great reference guide for this.

*A note on sensory needs: not all sensory sensitivities are constant, they can depend on other environmental or internal factors. It can be helpful to brief those helping people to their seats that they can offer someone another seat if where they were sat was uncomfortable. An outdoor space with natural light with a break time that allows for travel there and back can refresh someone.*

- Covid Safety: while it is no longer currently (at time of writing January 2022) your legal obligation to offer any covid adaptations, the disabled community have been particularly let down by the loosening of restrictions. Make sure people know they can wear a mask, that surfaces and doors are regularly cleaned and that you have hand sanitiser available for free. You could also offer some seating with 2 metre distance from each other for those who are being careful.
- Do they have appropriate accommodations anyone who uses BSL? Does the room have a Hearing Loop? Not everyone who uses a hearing loop uses BSL and vice versa. You might want to invest in your own loop meaning you can run more than one event at once, or if a venue doesn't have their own. A service counter hearing loop will cost around £150-£200 installed, room hearing loops will be more expensive depending on the size of the room.

- How many wheelchairs can be accommodated, do they have seating that can be removed for wheelchairs, will they do so in advance? Do they have seating appropriate for different body sizes? Make sure seat measurements are available on the website. Sofie Hagen has a fantastic breakdown of this. See reference guide. You could consider invested in a hoist for visitors.

## What should I consider when fundraising?

- Accessibility costs money, your extra admin time, the extra staffing. Don't cut corners.
- Make use of access support while writing the application, Arts Council England has a strong access offer.
- At the moment, Arts Council England only offers it's 'access funding' for supporting staff and artists. Take advantage of the support for your staff, and be a part of a movement towards better funding for disabled audiences, if you think this isn't fair use your platform to make your stance known and feed back to the arts council that it should be extending its access funding. Most costs at least some can be covered, for example Kendal Poetry Festival were encouraged to ask for half of the captioning costs in their access funding.

## How can I accommodate for different communication needs?

Lots of people communicate in different ways, flexibility and the ability to step away are key. Don't make assumptions about your own staff and what they feel confident to disclose. Make sure you ask how people want to be communicated with, but here's some top tips:

### Email

- It's good practice to include your pronouns in your email signature
- A note like this can also do wonders:  
Please note: I am a neurodivergent freelancer, meaning I often work outside of traditional working hours. Please do not reply outside of your working hours. We all need a rest!
- Structure using bullet points to make your information clear.
- Does it need to be an email? Remember that emails are much easier to track for decision making and accountability, but not everyone always needs to be cc'd in. When calls are easier sending an email with confirmation of decisions can be helpful to accountability.

## Meetings

- Stick to your agendas and share them in advance.
- If sharing a presentation make sure your presentation uses accessible font size and colour combinations, including alt descriptions for your images. Remember D/deaf people who lip read can't lipread and read presentations at the same time, so do pause to give people time to read what is on the slide first.
- Keep meetings to the length chosen, if they go over 45 minutes it's best to factor in a break.
- Add captioning to your meeting if there are attendees who need it.
- Transcribe your meeting notes and share to those appropriate.

## Breaks

- Ask your staff what break system works well for them, bearing in mind that not everyone feels empowered to ask for what they need.
- Make sure appropriate time for meals is considered.
- Offer flexible five minute breaks whenever needed, a workplace culture where not just smokers feel comfortable standing outside for a brief amount of time is really helpful.
- Encourage screen free time or meeting-free days.



### **Staff with access in mind**

- If you have the infrastructure you might want to consider employing someone to specifically care for the wellbeing of you staff. Otherwise make sure everyone knows who is assigned 'Wellbeing Officer'.
- It can be helpful to offer staff training to support disabled people including 'mental health first aid training' and that those members of staff are identifiable to all appropriate. Make sure those members of staff also get breaks! Disability awareness training for staff and volunteers can be really useful, Shape Arts have a great offer.
- It might be useful to have a direct line for audience members calling with specific access questions.

### **Useful tools for communication:**

- Slack – a messaging app designed for work teams, different channels can be assigned for different projects and staff can log out when it is the end of their work times.
- Voice notes – WhatsApp and other services offer a voice note option, it allows for the perks of a phone call, without needed to be picked up immediately by the other person, and can be kept for reference and more easily transcribed.
- Google drives – google drive allows for documents and spreadsheets that allow for group editing.

# Project Management

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## What do I need to know about budgeting?

The co-directors of Kendal Poetry Festival estimate that the cost of staff time was double what they had originally thought. Access work takes lots of extra admin time, which sometimes isn't visible in your end budgets.

### Things that took lots of extra admin time:

- Finding and employing captioners and BSL interpreters, and recruitment processes in general.
- Chasing poems from artists for captioning, collating then into one document.
- Liaising with the venue and partners. Clare noted that organisations felt more isolated and less ready for collaboration than they had before 2019, more needed explaining and more needed chasing.
- Publicity in a time of uncertainty and oversaturation of events.
- Doing things for the first time is psychologically more challenging, prepare for thinking and learning time.
- Personally engaging and interacting with as many audience members as possible, and building longer term trust before the event.

### A note on emergency planning

It's unfortunate to have to say but now more than ever contingency and flexibility of planning are vital. Kendal Poetry Festival had illnesses, train strikes, venue closures and price changes due to changes in circumstance and many more unforeseen changes that took place. This of course takes its toll on staff and time. Kendal Poetry Festival's hybrid festival benefitted from its ability to have more people working from distance and mitigating disasters, consider larger contingency budgets.

There were also ways that Kendal Poetry Festival<sup>22</sup> cost less than expected. Modern marketing is cheaper and more sustainable, you don't necessarily need huge budgets for paper marketing for example.

## Planning, organising and timelining

Access considerations for a festival is a year-long process, possibly longer. Factor in time long before and after the festival for thinking time, admin time and engagement work. If you have a board or other governance model include them in the decision making.

Risk assessments may need to be much more detailed and contain considerations for mental health and safety.

Think about resources you can make and offer around your programme.



Is your website accessible? There are programmes you can run your website through to check it works. This is particularly vital for finding your access information and booking tickets.

## What needs to be factored into planning for volunteers?

Involving volunteers in your projects, can absolutely be mutually beneficial, there are particular charities that support disabled people who might not otherwise be able to work into voluntary roles – this might be something you are interested in looking into.

### Some things to consider:

- If you are centring access in your festival make sure to also gather the access needs of your volunteers. Could you even design a volunteer programme designed to make volunteering accessible to disabled people?
- Your volunteers are offering their time for free, make sure their roles are clear, realistic and have clear limits on their time and responsibilities.
- If you are working with vulnerable volunteers, a good way to make sure you have met their needs is to have a personalised risk assessment for them. Many youth charities have a good model for this.
- Anyone who does work for your organisation for free whether that be consulting, or doing the festival a favour, should be classed as volunteers, with the rights of volunteers.

## What are the elements of good evaluation?

**An accessible evaluation process should be co-produced with disabled people.**

### Questions to ask yourselves:

- What do you want to know? How do you demonstrate its working? Can you limit what you really want to know rather than what will make you look good?
- Do you need an external evaluator? Can you bring them in early enough to design the process with you?
- Have you set up an evaluation system before starting on the festival, and have you started the process from the very first event?
- Is the evaluation structure accessible to your participants? Are there multiple ways they can offer feedback?
- Is your data both qualitative and quantitative?
- Does everyone know how and where to fill out a form? Are the questions easy to answer? Have you researched a best practice model for your kind of events?
- Have you included questions about accessibility in your form?
- Is your form readable by screen readers? Have you offered an audio version? A large print version?
- Have you timed how long the form should take and is this information clear? Can you offer an incentive for filling it in?
- Have you considered other forms of evaluation, such as interviews at the festival to invite feedback and qualitative information?

# Learning for the Future

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Kendal Poetry Festival had lots to learn from this year's festival, a project that offered so much to its audiences and treated its decision making with such care but overstretched their staff. There seemed to be three key themes to the challenges they faced:

## Scope and scale

Within the funding restraints, time restraints, staff restraints, venue restraints and much more, greater budget and staff time needed to be allowed for the scale of this kind of project to run.

Kendal Poetry Festival learned that a fully hybrid festival exceeded the budget available to them in 2022 – and as a result, staff wellbeing was compromised. Although Kendal Poetry Festival is an ambitious festival which has consistently expanded whilst in size and in accessibility and inclusivity, Kendal Poetry Festival is willing to change the size or form of the festival within the available budget in order to protect staff wellbeing.

## Facing Realistic Circumstances

As funding models are changing and the UK continues to face a cost of living crisis, it is okay to acknowledge that we are in an unstable and unsustainable arts landscape, that there simply isn't enough funding to support all fantastic arts projects. It's okay to feel frustrated about what you aren't able to achieve, and to be honest about how that has affected your organisation's ability to continue to make positive change.

## Staff wellbeing

All work, especially when it is emotionally meaningful to us, takes its physical and emotional toll on staff. Factor in reflection time. Plan seriously for breaks. Employ staff whose key role is to support the wellbeing of other staff.

Apply to same principles to festival staff as you apply to audiences and performers. Staff should feel included, acknowledged, welcomed, and supported. Staff should be encouraged to consider their own access and support needs, and to have these needs met.

**Festivals should, as standard, create structures and procedures for protect staff wellbeing, including:**

- Adequate staffing
- Appropriate recompense
- Full expenses paid for travel, accommodation and subsistence
- Clearly defined roles and hours
- Flexible working

**Beyond standard measures, staff should be encouraged and supported to identify individual access needs and to work with the festival to meet these needs. Perhaps most importantly, the festival should be characterised by a culture of care – in which wellbeing is valued above work. Consider how this might be embedded through measures such as:**

- Supervision and line management
- Pre- and post-festival self-care and away days

# Reference Guide

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## Specific Resources

[Tim Bray Theatre's introduction to familiarisation visits](#)

[Streamyard's livestreaming for beginners](#)

[Sofie Hagen's suggestions for fat accessibility at venues](#)

[Unlimited Accessible Marketing guide](#)

[Unlimited guide to writing an access rider](#)

[Unlimited guide to audio description](#)

[National Theatre dementia friendly performances](#)

[National Theatre Access List form](#)

[Battersea Arts Centre Relaxed Performance model](#)

[Tourette's Hero Relaxed performance FAQ](#)

[How to guide for writing in plain language](#)

[Guide for writing large print documents](#)

[Little Cog Guide to hosting accessible meetings](#)

[Becky Morris Knight on dealing with concentration fatigue](#)

[Creating Accessible Social Media Content](#)

[Best Practice for supporting self-identification with disability](#)

[A fantastic example of how to respond to being called out from Lizzo](#)

## Other Existing Guides

[Criptic Arts full guide to being hybrid](#)

[Spread The Word's report on access to literature and barriers for deaf and disabled people](#)

[We shall not be removed's 7 Principles to Ensure an Inclusive Recovery](#)

[Neuk Collective manifesto for working with Neurodivergent artists](#)

[Inklusion guide to accessible literature events](#)

[Guide for accessible exhibitions](#)

## **Theory and lived experience**

Arts Admin's case for supporting neurodivergent freelancers

Kim Simpson's Inclusion vs Interpellation

Arts Council essential read inclusivity and its relevance

Social Model of Disability

Dave Lupton on why now is the time for making space for disabled people in arts and Culture

Kai Syng Tan on unreasonable adjustments

Elinor Rowland on the effects of digital poverty

Drake Music guide to understanding disability

Drake Music guide to The Radical Model for disability

Disability Intersectionality: At A Glance

## **Books**

Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice – Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

Incurably human- Micheline Mason

Pride against prejudice - Jenny Morris

Understanding disability, from theory to practice - Michael Oliver

The Long Haul - Myles Horton

The Social Model of Disability – Mike Oliver

## **Partners**

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Kendal Poetry Festival