Accessibility Guide
Making Bat Events Accessible to Visually Impaired People

This guide is an introduction to making events more accessible to visually impaired people. Whether you want to run a bat walk or give a talk to visually impaired people this guide will provide you with some important hints and tips on how to best plan, advertise and deliver your event.

1. Introduction to visual impairment
By ‘visually impaired people’ we mean people with limited vision, which cannot be fully corrected with glasses or contact lenses. The term ‘visual impairment’ does not tell you much about a person’s sight, but it is the most neutral term and the best one to use unless you know that someone wants you to use another one to describe them. Visually impaired people is often abbreviated to VIP or VIPs, especially by VIPs themselves.

Some of the other more familiar terms for describing visually impaired people can be either confusing, or offensive, or both. For example:

- ‘Blind’ is often taken to mean complete lack of vision. However, it is extremely rare for someone to be totally blind. Only about 4% of all visually impaired people see nothing at all.
- ‘Partially sighted’ may be appropriate for the vast majority of visually impaired people, but it does not cover the tiny minority who have no vision at all.

Facts and figures
- About one in forty people in the UK are visually impaired.
- Most visually impaired people can see something – often quite a lot.
- Only 4% of visually impaired people are totally blind.
- Less than 1% of visually impaired people read Braille.
- Most visually impaired people do not carry a white cane.
- Less than 0.5 % of visually impaired people use a guide dog.
However, many people do refer to themselves as ‘blind’ or ‘partially sighted’ and these are not usually offensive terms.

‘Visually handicapped’ is a term that some people still use, including some visually impaired people. However, many people find it offensive, because of its association with old fashioned attitudes and negative assumptions about visually impaired people. You are strongly advised to avoid using this term!

2. Speaking to visually impaired people

What words can I use when speaking to visually impaired people? Visually impaired people use the same words as everyone else. You do not need to change the words you use when speaking to them. VIPs often use phrases like ‘Nice to see you’, or ‘See you later’, even if they can see nothing at all.

It is perfectly alright to mention colours when speaking to visually impaired people. Most visually impaired people will have had colour vision at some time, so they will know what you mean. Even people who have never seen colours will know what you mean if you say that ‘The sky is very blue today’, or ‘The grass is looking a bit brown’.

You do not have to describe everything you see to visually impaired people. Some like lots of description, but others are less interested in it. You won’t immediately know how much description a person wants, so it is best not to describe things in great detail until you are asked to. If you are acting as a sighted guide to a particular VIP this is something you can check with them; just ask them how much description they would like.

3. Offering help to visually impaired people

Never make assumptions about what help a visually impaired person needs. If you think a visually impaired person might need help ask them before you do anything else.

The most useful questions to ask if you think a visually impaired person needs help are:

‘Can I help you?’ or ‘How can I help you?’
If you are giving a visually impaired person directions – to a seat for example - don’t say ‘there’ or ‘over there’. Be more precise. Say ‘to your left’ or ‘to your right’, ‘behind you’ or ‘in front of you’ and if there is a step, be sure to say whether it is a step up or a step down.

When you approach a visually impaired person remember to speak to them, (don’t just look at them), or they may not know you are there. Unless they are in danger, do not grab hold of a visually impaired person before you speak to them. If it is noisy, a light touch on a visually impaired person’s arm will get their attention and confirm that it is actually them you are speaking to.

Visually impaired people may not pick up any of the non-verbal communication signals that sighted people use along with their voices, (e.g. eye contact, smiling, nodding, pointing, waving, etc). It is fine for you to continue to use these when speaking to visually impaired people, but remember to use your voice as well.

4. Delivering bat events to visually impaired people

Any event can be made accessible to VIPs: don't restrict VIPs to particular events as this is patronising and limiting. The easiest bat events to make accessible for VIPs are:

- A bat talk inside, featuring some bat calls and props to hand around (see our Resources List).
- A bat walk with bat detectors, preferably in a known environment e.g. communal garden, local park…etc.
- A training course to investigate further the world of echolocation, sound analysis and bat conservation.

5. Advertising your event

‘Our blind association had details of the course and knew how much I enjoy finding out about things and thought it was right up my street, so that’s how I got involved.’

Workshop participant

There are many small self-help groups of VIPs and also larger, more formal organisations. One way of finding out what exists in your area is to contact Visionary, the umbrella organisation for local societies for visually impaired people (www.visionary.org.uk) as they have a website with regional contacts. Your local council may also have a list of voluntary organisations. For other organisations that work with VIPs, see the section on ‘Contacts / Organisations’ at the end of this guide.
Many groups organise speakers or special events and will be happy to work with you to set up a bat event. We have always found local groups very helpful indeed and it is reassuring to participants to know that you are working with a familiar organisation.

6. Preparing the event

6.1 Making written information accessible for visually impaired people

‘Knowledge is power’ and lack of accessible information is one of the biggest barriers faced by visually impaired people. Visually impaired people may need to get their information via any or all of the following means:

- **Being read to by friends, family or other people**

  This is often the quickest and easiest way of getting information, but it is not ideal. It means that people have to depend on someone else being available whenever and wherever they need something read. It also means that they have very little privacy and unless they record what is being read, they will not be able to re-read it if they need to.

- **Audio information, including tape, CD, mp3, etc**

  This gives visually impaired people more privacy and means that they can re-read information as many times as they want to. However, it is not possible to skim through audio information in the same way as print. It is also difficult and time-consuming to go back to specific bits of information in long recordings.

- **Braille**

  This is much more convenient and flexible than audio information, but only about 1% of visually impaired people actually read braille. This is largely due to the fact that most people become visually impaired in later life and never learn it. It takes time and effort to learn braille and there are so many other ways to access written information nowadays that there is less incentive for people to make the effort.

- **Print that is big, bold and easy to see**

  This is the preferred format for the vast majority of visually impaired people, especially for shorter pieces of information. However, even very big print can be tiring to read and many people find they cannot continue for long.

This is an example of the kind of print that some visually impaired people need. It is 16 point Arial Bold, with extra space between the lines to make them easier to follow. Arial is a good font to use because it is very plain and
therefore easier for visually impaired people to distinguish. Being bold also makes it easier for people to see.

Many visually impaired people need print that is even bigger. This is 22 point Arial bold with double line spacing. Even this is too small for lots of visually impaired people to read.

6.2 Computers and other devices with synthetic speech
These enable people who cannot read text of any size to access written information. This could be information that has been scanned in, or from a website, email or text message. Synthetic speech can sound strange at first, but it makes handling information easier than recorded speech and people soon get used to it. However, although younger VIPs may know how to use the latest technology, many older people will not. Also, many VIPs cannot afford the expensive software needed to be able to use a computer.

6.3 Other equipment
Magnifiers, including closed circuit television systems and computers with text enlarging software can be used to enlarge print, but they can also be tiring to use, as the amount of letters or words a person can see at any one time is reduced.

There are other things that can be done to make print easier to read, apart from increasing its size. For more information see www.rnib.org.uk or the ‘See it Right’ book from RNIB.

If you are producing information and you want it to reach the maximum number of visually impaired people, you need to make it available in as many of the above formats as possible.

7. Producing accessible material
You should be able to produce material in large print yourself and you may be adept at recording onto CD or creating podcasts. If you need to produce material in braille
or in other formats, you will be able to find a transcription service by googling 'transcription service braille'. One company that has a useful website is A2i:

www.a2i.co.uk

The good news is that posting out information in accessible formats is free! For more information on this see: http://www.postoffice.co.uk/letters-parcels/mailing-guide/articles-blind

### A warning
Reading large print can be a slow process and on an event listening to audio material is difficult. So it is best to send out material in advance to give your VIPs time to read it. Alternatively, you can have CDs or large print publications to give out at the end of your event

#### 7.1 Making images accessible for VIPs

Diagrams often convey information to sighted people more quickly or more easily than text, but this is not necessarily true for visually impaired people, even if they are greatly enlarged. Some visually impaired people find diagrams made up of raised lines and different textures very helpful. Others do not.

When visually impaired people are presented with tactile diagrams, they have to feel them all over and try to build up a picture in their mind. Imagine yourself trying to understand a picture or diagram by looking through the ends of 10 drinking straws and you will have some idea of how difficult it is to ‘see’ through your fingertips. The simpler and clearer a diagram is, the easier it will be for visually impaired people to understand it. Tactile diagrams should be big enough for the individual details to be felt, but they need to be kept to a manageable size. This will be determined to a large extent by the method of production you choose.

Single diagrams can be made using various common materials, such as card, string, sandpaper, felt, etc. However, they should be kept simple and you should resist the temptation to use lots of different textures. Single diagrams can also be made using a plastic film (known as German film), which is available from RNIB. When this is placed on a rubber mat and drawn on with a ballpoint pen, a raised line appears which can be felt quite easily. However, this method is only suitable for simple line drawings.

Multiple copies of fairly simple diagrams can be produced by making a black and white master diagram, which is then photocopied onto special paper (known as swell paper) and fed through a heat fuser. This causes the black areas on your diagram to be raised. Diagrams produced by this method do not have a great variety of textures,
but they do have some colour contrast, which many visually impaired people will find helpful.

Diagrams with more complex textures can be created by making a master from card, string and other materials (as described above) and copied using a thermoform machine. This heats a thin plastic sheet, which is then drawn down over your master diagram. However, the resulting diagram will be plain white, and will not help anyone trying to use their residual vision.

Raised diagrams of any sort are useful to support explanations of simple morphology or to replace simple graphs. Complex illustrations are best avoided.

Don’t expect VIPs to run their fingers over a diagram and instantly understand what it is showing. Many VIPs will never have come across a raised diagram before. Your best tactic is to explain what the diagram is, first of all giving an overview e.g. ‘this is an outline of a pipistrelle bat with the wings stretched out’ and then moving onto details e.g. ‘Go to the far right of the diagram and you will find the tip on one wing. The raised lines that you can feel represent the long finger bones across which the wing membrane is stretched’.

7.2 Models and real bats

Raised diagrams can be useful but we have found that what VIPs really appreciate are simple models. Plastic models of bats can be used to illustrate the shape and structure of bats. The model in the picture on the right is a life size brown long-eared bat on which VIPs can feel the structure of the bat’s body and wings. 

Long-eared plastic toy bat (available from Bullyland Ltd.)

Also popular have been simple foam cut-outs of bats, drawn to scale. These are very simple to produce and every VIP can have their own cut-out. They give an excellent sense of the size of bats and, if you add appropriate weights to each you can also indicate the weight of real bats.

Models are also useful because you don’t have to spend hours preparing them: all you need to do is to source them.

Freeze dried bats have also helped us to illustrate talks and most popular of all has been the introduction of a real live bat. People can be understandably cautious about handling dead bats, however a dead bat in a small plastic bag can be useful to give people an idea of their size and weight. Doing the crumble test with bat droppings can also be popular with some participants.
7.3 Equipment

Equipment with dials and other controls can often be modified by using ‘bump-ons’ (raised plastic bumps) and/or ‘raised strips’ or tacti-mark to indicate positions. You can purchase these tactile labelling products from the RNIB website shop [www.rnib.org.uk/shop](http://www.rnib.org.uk/shop). They work best on detectors where the dial can be marked (ie it doesn’t turn within the body of the detector) and the larger the dial the more exactly they can be placed and used. We have typically placed them at around 25KHz for big bats, 50 KHz for pipistrelles and myotis and occasionally 110KHZ for lesser horseshoes depending where events are held. Feedback from the most recent event for VIPs suggested that the 50KHz marker be cut to a width covering 10 KHz so that the bottom edge would line up at 45KHz for common pipistrelles and the top edge with 55KHz for soprano pipistrelle.

8. Running the event.

8.1 The venue

Transport is one of the biggest barriers for VIPs. If you are able to find some funding to cover transport costs and offer this to participants you will be seen as being very welcoming. If you are using the established meeting place for a local group of VIPs then the majority of your audience will be familiar with it. If you are using another venue, perhaps for a bat walk, then you need to:

- Send out clear directions for travel by car and public transport
- Give information about accessible car parking
- Have clear signs at the venue
- Ensure there is a way of VIPs being met at the entrance and guided to the room.
  Staff and volunteers may need some training.
- Have clear signs on toilets.
- Check that the route from the entrance to the room is free of trip hazards such as boxes and plants.
- Pick a room with good lighting levels and good acoustics: VIPs are reliant on sound.
- Make sure there are facilities for guide dogs.

Many VIPs have sight problems as a result of the aging process and as with all groups of older people, it is therefore common to find that a group will include some hearing aid users. Your venue should have a working induction loop and you will need to know how this operates. Alternatively, you can provide radio aids. It will be helpful if you ask on an enrolment form how many people need to use the induction loop or radio aids. You will also find that there is always someone who uses a hearing aid but not an induction loop. Reserve seats for any hearing aid users so they will be near to the tutor. For more information on induction loops and radio aids
8.2 Numbers
How large a group of VIPs should you have? This will partly depend on the event and on your own confidence and expertise. If you have never worked with VI adults before, then starting with a group of 8 –10 is probably around the right number. Twelve is ideal and anything beyond 14 is challenging, although for a seated, indoor talk a larger number is manageable. One of the problems with larger numbers is that you need to organise tactile props or models for each individual.

On a bat walk, remember that each VIP may have their own sighted guide and so a group of 12 suddenly becomes a group of 24.

8.3 Sighted guides
You will need volunteer sighted guides at your event. The guides are there to escort VIPs around the venue and outside on bat walks. For an inside event, you will not need as many sighted guides but, for a bat walk, we recommend that each VIP has their own allocated sighted guide. Some VIPs will bring their own guide but others will require you to provide a guide. Your local VI group may have a pool of guides. It is polite to offer guides their travel expenses – either at your institutional rate or at the usual rate offered by the local society. It will add considerably to the bat walk if you can recruit guides from local bat groups but remember that bat group members need some basic training before they act as guides. Your local society may be able to provide this or you could contact one of the organisations (there will be a cost involved) listed in the help section at the end of this guide.

9. In the field
The following guidelines for walks in the natural environment and for organising handling sessions have been produced by AddVenture in Learning, an organisation of VIPs that runs adult education courses.

- It is a good idea to introduce the site and features to be visited whilst in a sheltered, comfortable location, where all VIPs can hear and concentrate on what you are saying.
- It will take approximately twice as long to take a group of VIPs around a site.
- Choose the route carefully, so that VIPs are able to feel, smell or hear the features you wish them to experience. Walking along a tarmac track that over-looks important features of the natural environment at a distance is of very little value.
- Pause to allow VIPs the time to touch features such as plants and trees.
Each VIP should have a sighted guide, so steps should not generally be a problem. However, very uneven terrain will be difficult for VIPs to traverse.

Please ensure that everyone in the group has caught up before starting a commentary or explanation. With a large group, it may be helpful to have several assistants who can give the same information to smaller groups of VIPs.

9.1 Handling objects

Visually impaired learners enjoy real specimens (or replicas) being passed around, but this can be a difficult situation to manage well.

If you are going to hand around samples (e.g. models of bats or small objects) please bring as many as possible. It may take some VIPs several minutes to handle a sample sufficiently to get the full picture. Imagine yourself looking at an object through the end of those 10 drinking straws again. Think how long it would take to identify something. The additional time can mean that a group of 15 students might take 20 minutes or so to handle a single item.

If you want your group to handle specimen items, it is probably best to arrange your talk so that you introduce the items towards a break in your talk and then allow people to handle them in their own time.

Do not try to talk about different subjects whilst VIPs are still handling samples or specimens. Sighted guides will be assisting students and therefore there will be chatter and also, VIPs cannot concentrate on handling an item and listening to you at the same time. Use this time to move around the group and answer individual questions about the items being handled.

If possible, label the objects to be passed round: this will help the sighted guides and some of the VIPs to identify each object. Labels can be provided in large print and in braille.

Avoid passing objects around starting from the middle of the group: they get lost at one of the ends. It will be more effective to start objects from either end of a semi-circle, with perhaps a duplicate object beginning in the middle.

9.2 Feedback and evaluation

Of course you will want to know how well your event has gone, especially if this is the first time you have worked with VIPs. But a note of caution: when working with
excluded or disadvantaged groups, it can of course be very difficult to extract constructive criticism, as people may feel that criticisms will lead to opportunities being withdrawn. As you continue to work with groups of disabled people, confidence and trust will grow and you will receive more useful feedback.

Paper-based evaluation is difficult as completing forms presents huge barriers to many VIPs. Encouraging people to send in comments – in any format- will elicit some responses but for many VIPs writing letters is very demanding.

You will have your own way of getting feedback, but some ways that we have found helpful are:

- A plenary discussion. It will usually be acceptable to record this and listening to comments afterwards when you have time to reflect can be productive. Be careful that the guides don’t take over the discussion. If there is time, you can invite comments from guides and certainly they can be encouraged to send you feedback in writing. But the day is primarily for the VI learners and it is their feedback that is the most important.

- A ‘round table’ where everyone in turn makes one or two comments. This means that you get feedback from all the participants but it does tend to lead to people saying ‘I agree with what X said.’

- A follow-up telephone interview: this works well but is time-consuming. If you can find someone who was not part of the workshop to phone up then this may result in more critical comments, as the VIPs won’t be giving negative feedback direct to you.

If you see the workshop as the start of a longer relationship, then asking for ideas for future events can be helpful.

It is good practice to thank the guides at the end of the day and to write to them afterwards. If you have worked with a local society acknowledging their help will go down well too.

*Good luck with your event!*

10. Further contacts / organisations

**Action for Blind People**
14-16 Verney Road, London. SE16 3DZ
Telephone: 0207 732 8771
Website: [www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk](http://www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk)

**Partially Sighted Society**
Registered Office, 7/9 Bennetthorpe, Doncaster. DN2 6AA
Telephone: 0844 477 4966
Website: [http://www.partsight.org.uk](http://www.partsight.org.uk)
Deafblind UK
National Centre for Deafblindness, John and Lucille van Geest Place, Cygnet Road, Hampton, Peterborough. PE7 8FD
Telephone: 01733 358 100 (voice/text)
Website: www.deafblind.org.uk

Royal National Institute of Blind People
Head Office RNIB, 105 Judd Street, London. WC1H 9NE
Telephone: 0303 123 9999 (Helpline)
Website: www.rnib.org.uk

AddVenture in Learning
c/o Isobell Phillips, 2 Holly Drive, Pen - y Ffordd. CH4 0NE
Telephone:01244 544749
Email: aiphillips_2007@yahoo.co.uk
Website: www.add-ventureinlearning.org.uk

Sense
101 Pentonville Road, London. N1 9LG
Telephone: 0845 127 0060 / 020 7520 0999
Website: www.sense.org.uk

Tactile diagrams:

Royal National Institute of Blind People

Link: http://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/accessibilityinformation/accessibleformats/accessibleimages/Pages/accessible_images.aspx

Zychem Ltd

Link: http://www.zychem.moonfruit.com/#/fusing-service/4514470885

See also

- E.1.c - Bats and Visually Impaired People - Film
- D.2.e - Avon Visually Impaired People Case Study
- A.2.c - Physical resources for events with VIPs
- A.2.b - Weight for foam bats

This Accessibility Guide has been prepared by Paul Sullivan, Claire Wickham from AddVenture in Learning and the Bat Conservation Trust.

Credit photos: AddVenture in Learning and Bat Conservation Trust .

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