

Accessible Co-Design.

A guide for facilitators,
designers & researchers.

WHY HAS THIS GUIDE BEEN WRITTEN?

Disability and impairment affect 24% of New Zealanders in the shape of physical, sensory, learning or mental health related difficulties.

1 in 4 co-design participants could experience any of these challenges.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

This guide will help you make co-design accessible for your participants.

The aim of co-design is to empower, so let's begin.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for co-design or participatory design facilitators, designers and researchers.

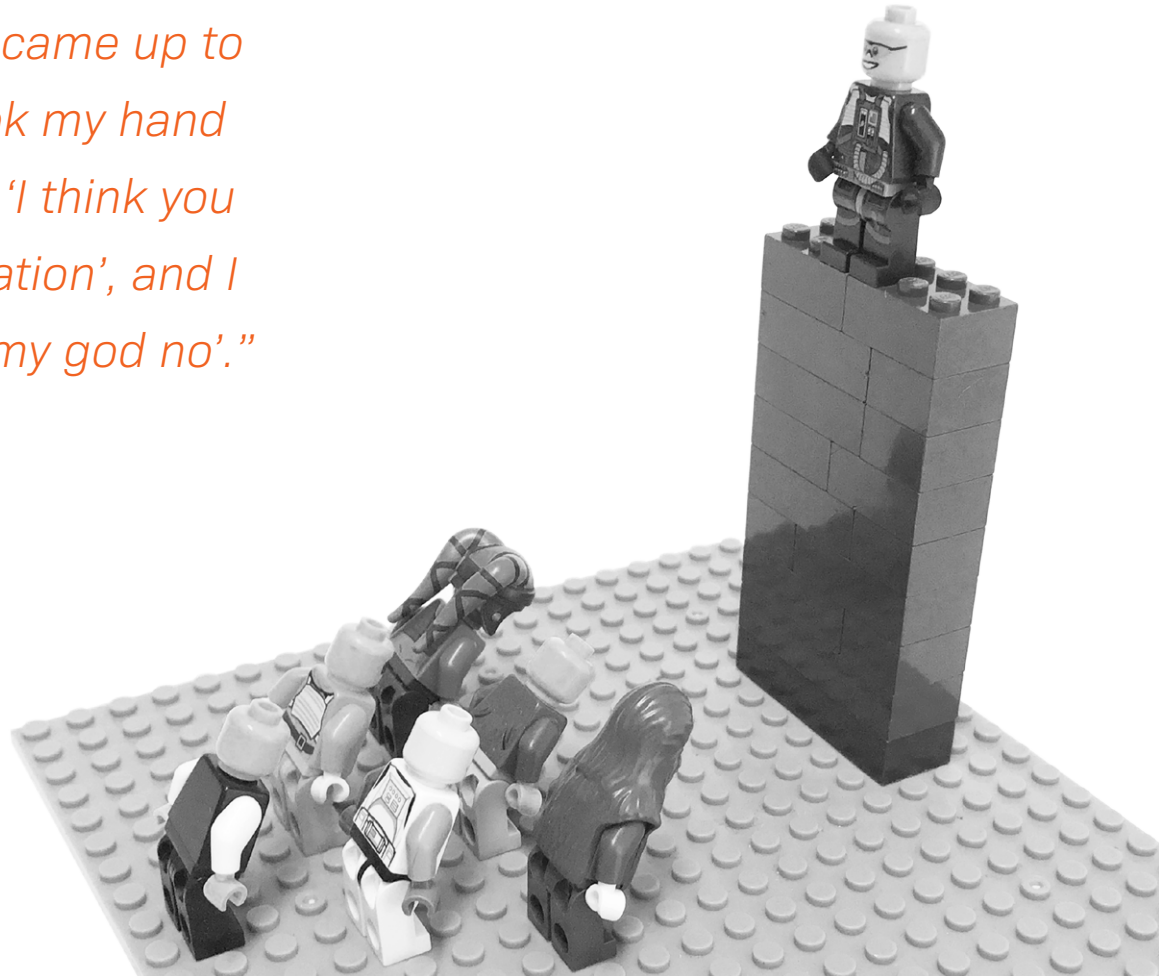
However, the principles described can be applied in any situation when engaging with people who experience disability and impairment.

FOOTNOTE: This guide was created with tertiary students who experience disability or impairment. Quotes in this guide are real opinions or stories shared by participants who partook in this research project.

What does 'accessibility' mean for co-design?

'Accessibility' refers to physical and social accessibility. Accessibility in co-design is achieved through a safe, welcoming and flexible approach where participants are encouraged to determine and manage their participation. Participation in accessible co-design may be verbal or physical.

“... She even came up to me and shook my hand and was like ‘I think you are an inspiration’, and I was like ‘oh my god no.’”



TOP TIP #1

People who experience disability don't wake up in the morning and think 'I am disabled'. Their disability or impairment is their normality. If they twitch, drop something, or forget words, just 'roll with it'.

It is normal—because it is their normal.

TOP TIP #2

An accessible approach is one where participants are empowered to take control of their co-design experience, where they feel encouraged to adapt any activity or method to suit their creative abilities.

TOP TIP #3

Give participants a wide variety of making options. Participants will seek tools that are familiar, that they are good at using or like, so offer a range of alternatives.

TOP TIP #4

Give plenty of notice about final details. Ideally, a week's notice will allow participants to organise their transportation and schedules.

TOP TIP #5

Take time to pause before participants arrive. Forget about the logistics of their disability. Imagine the people that are about to walk into the room, focus on their personalities, their vast experience, and the stories they will share.

TOP TIP #6

Living with disability or impairment does not make someone better at asking for help.

But it's always okay to ask—'have you just about got it or would you like a hand?'

Acknowledge that you know they can do it, but you are happy to assist.

Seven Principles for Accessible Co-design

1. Use appropriate language
2. Make participation accessible
3. Allow more time
4. Person first—disability second
5. Take a thoughtful approach
6. Offer, don't assume
7. Reflect continuously

1

Use appropriate language

Correct language for disability can feel like a minefield. Everyone feels different about disability language—including those with the same condition or disability.

“I feel like ‘disability’ groups everyone together who don’t necessarily have anything in common.”

A.

Copy their language. Some people may use technical names, or just call it 'my disability'.

B.

Never use 'crippled' or 'handicapped'.

C.

Just ask—'what term do you prefer to use to describe your disability?'
Or 'how would you like me to refer to your disability or impairment?'

D.

Use the least amount of words in the clearest way possible.

E.

Still feeling stuck? The tone you use is far more important than the words you use.

2

Make participation accessible

Accessible participation is welcoming, accommodating, flexible and values any kind of contribution.

“I feel like I always have to anticipate my route, figure out how many people can fit into that space, and I don’t feel like people make room for me to avoid bumping into them.”

A.

Check with your participants about any specific needs.

B.

Send any material in advance to help people prepare and respond. Some people need time to generate thoughts and opinions.

C.

Check with participants about lighting (natural or artificial) for the ideal visual experience.

D.

Check with wheelchair users about the necessary clearance for them to fit to comfortably under the table.

E.

Accommodate your participants—prepare their journey from the street to the meeting space. Identify an accessible route and prop doors open.

F.

Think about the placement of navigational signs at the appropriate eye-level.

G.

It is easy to forget a name. Provide name tags or large format name cards.

H.

If you are serving refreshments, provide straws. Some people may require the use of a straw to drink from a glass.

3

Allow more time

People who experience disability or impairment may need extra time to organise transport and navigate to the session.

“...we have extra things we have to account for that other people don’t factor in...”

“It’s going to take me half an hour to get to this place, when for someone else it will take 5 minutes, so that cuts more out of my time... Sometimes that feels relatively unjust.”

A.

Know how to book a wheelchair taxi.

B.

Make sure to check if people can arrange their own transport.

C.

Give participants ideally a week to confirm the location of your session.

D.

Accept that some people may arrive early while others may be late.

E.

Unexpected obstacles can cause delays. Don't let this become a problem.

F.

Think carefully about your first activity. Choose something that can be quickly explained if someone arrives late.

G.

Offer regular breaks, every 45 minutes is ideal.

4

Person first — disability second

Take a moment before everyone arrives to forget about their disabilities, and be ready to meet and greet interesting people.

“I feel like the only time I remember [about their disability] is when someone else points it out, or you notice someone else noticing.”

“I really really really don’t want people to feel sorry for me, I don’t want to be someone’s inspiration.”

“... just cause it is my life, I don’t particularly feel the need to be told ‘I am awesome cause I am disabled.’ It is just my life.”

A.

Focus on a person's personality and capabilities.

B.

Let people volunteer information about their disability or impairment. Disability can be private.

D.

Do not assume that by knowing someone's diagnosis you know them and how to work with them. Adapt as you go.

E.

Do not make 'you are inspiring' comments. People are not defined by their disability.

5

Take a thoughtful approach

Be flexible and accommodating around participant engagement with a method or activity.

In some co-design toolkits, creative methods or activities are quite prescriptive. Be flexible and allow people to manage their engagement. For example some may prefer to contribute verbally, while others might like to engage through hands-on making. Encourage and celebrate both types of participation.

“That was one of those days, when I just couldn’t use my brain, so I was making things instead, and then Sarah and David were just saying all these things, and I was like ‘wow I had never thought of that’, and so I thought I would do a little model for them...”

A.

Tell people about the purpose of the activity and let them choose how they communicate their ideas.

B.

Where possible, don't ask direct questions about matters which are personal, or could make someone feel uncomfortable.

C.

Trust the process—allow people to disclose or share personal experiences of their disability. Try not to ask directly. For example, asking

‘what associations do you have with the word ‘disability?’ May make people feel more comfortable and be more open.

D.

Don't be surprised if you are asked to repeat yourself 2-3 times. Calmly repeat yourself and check the participants have understood.

6

Offer, don't assume

Asking for help is hard. As a facilitator there are different ways to offer help in a supportive manner.

“Asking for help is alright, but I do struggle to balance asking for help and not asking for help. Sometimes it’s easier to not ask, cause the only person you are inconveniencing is yourself.”

“I am still learning to be okay with people helping me, I get a bit defensive or I would rather not do something completely than ask for help sometimes.”

A.

Remember, people who experience disability or impairment may not feel comfortable asking for help.

B.

When offering help, acknowledge that they are capable but you can assist if they would like. For example, asking “have you just about got it? Or can I give you a hand?”

7

Reflect continuously

You will learn more about people and the co-design process if you reflect continuously.

“I guess I have been thinking a lot about myself and disability, and other people with disability a lot more than usual... it’s kind of an aspect of my life but I don’t really connect with it, even though it’s a really big part of my life, it just is what it is. So speaking about it like this has kind of reminded me it’s different.”

A.

Following each activity, ask your participants to reflect on what they said or made, how they felt about the activity, and what they learnt.

B.

Ask people to reflect on why they chose to use certain tools and materials.

C.

As a facilitator, continuously reflect on your own approach, and how you might make adjustments to current and future sessions.

An Accessible Co-design Toolkit

It is important to consider what tools and materials you provide and how they may be made more accessible.

Reaching forward or around people may be difficult. Using trays on wheels will help the 'making' tools and materials be accessible for participants.

It's hard to know who might find some tools or materials tricky to use in a workshop. Think about how you can make them more accessible.



Tricky Tools

Scissors can be tricky for anyone with reduced fine motor skills. Provide scissors, but the simplest solution is to pre-cut all materials, which also saves time in the session.

Tape is tricky for everyone. The sticky end can be hard to find. A simple solution like a guitar pick, or bull clip, attached to the end of the roll will make tape easier to use.

Marker pens can have difficult to remove lids, so loosen lids in advance.

Post-it notes can be a tricky material to use if clear handwriting or correct spelling is a challenge for someone.

Straws are a handy tool to include if you are providing refreshments, as some participants may require a straw to drink from a glass.



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