Guide

Inclusive Team Events

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Introduction

Creating inclusive team events ensures that all employees feel valued, respected, and able to participate fully, regardless of their background, identity, or personal circumstances. Inclusive events foster a sense of belonging and strengthen team cohesion, making them more impactful and engaging for everyone.

This guide provides a practical framework for planning and delivering inclusive team events, from initial concept to execution and follow-up.

This guide aims to help event organisers, HR professionals, managers, and team leaders create and deliver team events that are accessible, welcoming, and enjoyable for all. It highlights key considerations, provides practical strategies, and offers a checklist to support inclusive event planning.

Who is this guide for?

- Team leaders and managers planning team-building activities

- HR professionals organising company-wide events

- Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) champions ensuring inclusive practices

- Event organisers designing internal or external corporate events

- Anyone responsible for team culture and employee engagement

Key Terminology

- **Inclusion:** Creating an environment where all individuals feel valued, respected, and able to participate fully.

- **Accessibility:** Ensuring that people of all abilities can engage in and enjoy an event without barriers.

- **Psychological Safety:** A work environment where individuals feel safe to express themselves without fear of negative consequences.

- **Neurodiversity:** Recognising and accommodating different ways of thinking, learning, and processing information.

- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Being aware of and respecting different cultural norms, values, and practices.

- **Hybrid Events:** Events designed to be accessible both in-person and virtually.

Planning an Inclusive Team Event

Pre-Event Considerations

Before diving into logistics, it's essential to establish a strong foundation for an inclusive event by considering its purpose, the diverse needs of your team, and the necessary resources.

Every event should have a well-defined purpose that aligns with the team's goals and values. When setting objectives, **consider the following:**

- **Why is this event being held?** Is it for team bonding, recognition, learning, or networking?

- **Who will benefit from this event?** Ensure that all employees, regardless of background, identity, or ability, can engage meaningfully.

- **How does inclusivity fit into the event?** Instead of treating accessibility and inclusion as a separate task, embed them into every stage of planning.

- **What outcomes are expected?** Define success measures beyond attendance, such as engagement, feedback, and comfort levels of participants.

Consult Your Team

A truly inclusive event reflects the diverse needs and preferences of its attendees. The best way to ensure this is to engage employees early in the planning process.
Here's how:

- Send out a pre-event survey to ask about dietary requirements, accessibility needs, and preferred event formats (e.g., in-person, hybrid, fully virtual).

- Host a planning session or focus group with a diverse group of employees to discuss potential barriers and improvements.

- Encourage open dialogue by creating a culture where employees feel comfortable expressing their needs without fear of being an inconvenience.

- Consider intersectionality – someone's experience isn't defined by a single identity. For example, a disabled person who is also a parent may have different needs than a single, non-disabled colleague.

Planning an Inclusive Team Event

Budget For Inclusion

An inclusive event may require additional resources, but these investments are crucial for ensuring that everyone can participate equitably.

When planning the budget, consider:

- Accessibility costs could include sign language interpreters, captioning services, accessible transportation, or assistive technology for virtual attendees.

- Dietary accommodations that cater to religious, ethical, and medical dietary restrictions is essential. This means budgeting for halal, kosher, gluten-free, vegetarian, vegan, and allergy-friendly alternatives where relevant.

- Flexible participation formats (with in-person and virtual attendance options) can increase accessibility for those unable to attend in person. If the event is in-person only, consider remote engagement options such as recorded sessions.

- Financial inclusivity – if employees are expected to contribute (e.g., paying for meals or transport), ensure there is a way to support those for whom this might be a barrier.

Cultural & Religious Considerations

Recognising and respecting cultural and religious diversity is crucial for creating truly inclusive team events. Employees come from a variety of backgrounds, and their traditions, beliefs, and practices should be considered to ensure full participation.

Date Selection: Avoid Scheduling Events on Major Religious or Cultural Holidays

One of the most common yet avoidable mistakes in event planning is scheduling on dates that conflict with significant religious or cultural observances. Employees observing these occasions may be unable to attend due to fasting, prayer, or religious obligations, potentially making them feel excluded.

- **Consult our DEI Calendar:** Before setting a date, check interfaith and cultural holiday calendars to avoid major observances such as Ramadan, Yom Kippur, Diwali, Chinese New Year, and others. Be aware that some holidays follow lunar calendars and may shift annually.

- **Seek Input from Employees:** If possible, consult your team or use an anonymous survey to identify any conflicts with proposed event dates.

- **Offer Alternative Dates or Sessions:** If avoiding all major holidays isn't possible, consider holding multiple sessions or recordings to accommodate those who may not be able to attend.

- **Consider Fasting Periods:** For events involving meals, avoid scheduling during fasting observances like Ramadan or offer later start times so that those fasting can participate in meals when they break their fast.

Cultural & Religious Considerations

Prayer & Reflection Spaces: Ensure There Are Suitable Spaces for Individuals Who Need to Pray or Reflect

For employees who follow religious practices requiring daily prayers or moments of reflection, an inclusive event should provide a suitable space to accommodate their needs.

- **Choose a Venue with Designated Prayer Spaces:** Many modern venues, particularly conference centres and larger event spaces, already provide multi-faith rooms – ensure one is available.

- **Provide a Private, Quiet Area:** If a formal prayer space isn't available, designate a private, quiet room that can be used for reflection, prayer, or meditation. Avoid placing this space near noisy or high-traffic areas.

- **Communicate Availability in Advance:** Let attendees know in advance that a space will be available, so they don't feel the need to ask or make last-minute arrangements.

- **Consider Timing for Prayer Breaks:** If the event spans several hours, be mindful of prayer times for different faiths and incorporate flexible break periods so attendees can step away as needed.

Respectful Attire: Consider Dress Codes That Are Inclusive of Different Cultural and Religious Requirements

Attire can be a deeply personal and cultural matter, and event organisers should be mindful of setting expectations that accommodate a range of religious and cultural practices.

- **Avoid Imposing Strict Dress Codes That Conflict with Religious Attire:** Some employees may wear head coverings (e.g., hijabs, turbans, kippahs) or religious garments (e.g., long skirts, loose-fitting clothing) as part of their faith. Dress codes should not require clothing that contradicts these practices.

- **Provide Flexibility for Cultural and Religious Clothing:** If the event has a specific theme (e.g., formal attire), ensure that expectations accommodate variations in dress styles that align with cultural and religious norms.

- **Be Mindful of Workplace Social Norms:** If an event is casual (e.g., summer party), ensure that employees who prefer modest attire are not made to feel out of place. Avoid dress themes that require revealing clothing (e.g., beachwear or costume themes that exclude religious dress styles).

Venue & Logistics

The choice of venue and event logistics significantly impacts the inclusivity of a team event. A well-considered location ensures that all employees, regardless of mobility, neurodiversity, or transport needs, can fully participate without barriers and feel comfortable.

Physical Accessibility

Attendees with mobility impairments, wheelchair users, or those with temporary injuries should be able to navigate the space comfortably.

Key Accessibility Considerations:

Step-Free Access

The venue should have step-free entry, ramps, or lifts to ensure that all attendees, including those using wheelchairs, crutches, or pushchairs, can enter and move around easily.

Accessible Toilets

Ensure that toilets are equipped with grab bars, wide doors, and an emergency assistance system for those with mobility impairments. The location of accessible toilets should be clearly signposted.

Seating Arrangements

- Provide a mix of seating options, including chairs with armrests, adjustable-height seating, and spaces for wheelchair users.
- Avoid tightly packed seating that restricts movement and ensure there's enough space for those who need mobility aids.
- If seating is pre-assigned, allow attendees to indicate any accessibility preferences beforehand.

Stage and Presentation Area Accessibility

If the event includes speakers or panel discussions, ensure the stage or speaking area is accessible to all, including ramps or lifts if necessary.

Venue & Logistics

Transport & Location

An event's location can be a deciding factor in whether employees are able to attend. By considering various transport needs, organisers can ensure equitable access for all attendees.

Best Practices for Transport & Location:

Public Transport Access

Choose a venue that is well-connected to major public transport routes (bus, train, tram) and ensure event start/end times align with public transport schedules.

Drop-Off Points

Ensure there is a safe drop-off zone near the entrance for taxis, ride-shares, and private vehicles, particularly for attendees with mobility impairments.

Parking Accessibility

- Provide parking options that include designated Blue Badge (disabled) parking spaces close to the venue entrance.
- If parking is limited, offer alternative transport solutions such as ride-sharing or reimbursing taxi fares for those who require accessible transport.

Hybrid & Remote Attendance Options

- If possible, offer a virtual attendance option to accommodate those who are remote, unwell, or unable to travel.
- Ensure live streams have captions and transcripts for accessibility.
- Use platforms that allow interaction for remote participants (virtual Q&A sessions, live chat).

Venue & Logistics

Quiet Spaces: Designated Areas for Sensory Breaks

For neurodivergent individuals, those with anxiety, or anyone who may feel overwhelmed in social settings, having a designated quiet space can make a significant difference in their ability to engage with the event.

Location

- Identify a separate, low-traffic room or area that is free from loud noise, bright lights, and distractions.
- Ideally, this space should be away from main event activities but still easily accessible

Signposting & Communication

- Inform attendees in advance that a quiet space is available so they know they can access it if needed.
- Use clear, discreet signage directing individuals to the quiet area without making it feel exclusionary.

Seating & Environment

- Provide comfortable seating and a calming atmosphere.
- Dim lighting options or the ability to reduce sensory stimulation (e.g., soft furnishings, noise-cancelling headphones).

Guidelines for Use

- The quiet space should be a no-interruption zone where attendees can decompress.
- Consider adding a sign reminding others to keep voices low and respect personal space.

Communication & Invitations

The way an event is communicated can significantly influence whether attendees feel welcome and valued. Using inclusive language, offering multiple formats, and ensuring accessibility from the outset ensures that all employees can easily engage with event details.

Inclusive Language

- Use simple, direct, and non-exclusionary language in all communications. Avoid jargon, corporate buzzwords, or culturally specific idioms that may not be universally understood.

- Ensure that wording is gender-neutral and non-assumptive (e.g., "Hello team" instead of "Hey guys").

- Be mindful of cultural and religious sensitivities when crafting invitations to ensure all attendees feel included.

- When referring to accessibility accommodations, frame them as standard, not optional, **for example:**

" The venue is step-free, and quiet spaces will be available ✔

" If you need special accommodations, please let us know ✗

Communication & Invitations

There are multiple ways to invite people to the event, and to communicate about the agenda, ensuring accessibility for all. Examples include:

- Ensure event invitations, schedules, and details are available in accessible digital formats (screen reader-friendly PDFs, HTML emails) and print versions if needed.

- Provide key information in large print, braille, and audio formats where necessary.

- If using video or recorded announcements, ensure captions or transcripts are provided for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals.

- Some individuals with neurodiverse conditions or visual impairments may prefer plain-text emails without excessive formatting. Offer this as an option.

- If your organisation has multilingual employees, consider offering translated event details.

Practicalities on the Day

Pronouns & Name Tags

- Offer the choice to include pronouns on name tags without making it mandatory.
- Gender-neutral greetings – use inclusive phrases such as "Welcome everyone" rather than gendered greetings.
- If someone chooses not to disclose their pronouns, ensure that all attendees respect their preference.

Food & Dietary Considerations

- Clearly label all food and drink items with allergens (e.g., nuts, dairy, gluten) and dietary suitability (vegan, halal, kosher, etc.).
- Where possible, have separate areas for different dietary requirements to avoid cross-contamination and confusion.
- Ensure all staff serving food are aware of dietary needs and can confidently answer questions.

Activities That Cater to All Attendees

- Provide a variety of engagement styles, including interactive discussions, physical activities, seated sessions, and creative elements.
- Different Energy Levels: Not everyone enjoys high-energy activities – offer quiet or observational roles alongside more dynamic options.
- Arrange seating to allow choice – some may prefer small group discussions, while others might opt for larger, more open formats.

Inclusive Engagement Options

- For introverts and neurodivergent individuals, provide options for written contributions (e.g., sticky notes, digital polls, or message boards) for those who may not feel comfortable speaking in a group.
- For those with physical limitations, ensure that activities do not require standing for long periods and offer seating alternatives.
- If applicable, allow remote participation via a live stream, recorded session, or virtual breakout rooms.

Post-Event Follow-Up

The impact of an inclusive event doesn't end when the event concludes – thoughtful follow-up helps reinforce inclusion and continuously improve future events.

Gather Feedback: Understanding Attendee Experiences

- ·Send a post-event survey that allows attendees to share their experiences confidentially. Questions should cover inclusivity, accessibility, and overall satisfaction.

- ·For more in-depth feedback, consider holding small focus groups with a diverse range of attendees to gain deeper insights.

- ·Ask whether accommodations (e.g., quiet spaces, transport, hybrid access) were sufficient and what could be improved.

Reflect & Improve: Learning from Feedback

- Identify patterns in the feedback – were there recurring barriers that should be addressed next time?

- Use insights to refine logistics, participation formats, and communication strategies for upcoming events.

- If relevant, summarise key takeaways with leadership teams or employee networks / committees to embed inclusive event practices more broadly.

Appreciating Attendees, Speakers, and Organisers

- Acknowledge contributions in a way that considers different preferences - some may appreciate a shoutout, while others may prefer a private thank-you.

- If guest speakers or panellists contributed, ensure they are credited appropriately in post-event summaries or social media posts.

- When inviting attendees to future events, mention improvements made based on their input to demonstrate that their feedback was valued.

Conclusion

From planning to post-event reflections, inclusivity should be embedded at every stage of a team event. Thoughtful communication, well-planned logistics, and meaningful follow-up create an experience where all attendees feel seen, heard, and valued.

When done right, inclusive team events can strengthen team culture, build trust, and set a new standard for engagement within an organisation.

Inclusive Event Checklist

Pre-Event Planning

Set Clear Objectives

☐ Define the purpose of the event (e.g., team bonding, recognition, learning, networking).

☐ Ensure success measures go beyond attendance (e.g., engagement, feedback, comfort levels).

Consult Your Team

☐ Send a pre-event survey to understand dietary needs, accessibility requirements, and preferred participation formats.

☐ Hold focus groups or planning sessions with a diverse group of employees.

☐ Consider intersectionality – how different identities may affect participation.

Budget for Inclusion

☐ Allocate resources for accessibility needs (e.g., sign language interpreters, captioning, transport assistance).

☐ Budget for diverse dietary requirements (halal, kosher, vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, allergen-friendly options).

☐ Provide flexible participation formats (in-person, hybrid, or virtual).

☐ Ensure financial inclusivity – offer support for costs where needed.

Cultural & Religious Considerations

Data Selection

☐ Check a diversity & inclusion calendar for major religious/cultural holidays.

☐ Consult employees about potential scheduling conflicts.

☐ Avoid fasting periods or adjust mealtimes accordingly.

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Inclusive Event Checklist

Cultural & Religious Considerations

Prayer & Reflection Spaces

- Confirm if the venue has a multi-faith prayer room. If no dedicated space is available, provide a quiet, private area.

- Communicate the availability of the space to attendees in advance.

- Schedule flexible breaks to accommodate prayer times.

Respectful Attire

- Ensure any dress code does not conflict with cultural or religious practices.

- Offer flexibility in formal or casual attire to respect different customs.

Venue & Logistics

Physical Accessibility

- Select a venue with step-free access and lifts where needed.

- Ensure toilets are fully accessible with grab bars and emergency assistance features.

- Provide seating options, including wheelchair-accessible areas.

- Ensure the stage/speaker areas are accessible for all presenters.

Transport & Location

- Choose a venue with strong public transport links.

- Provide accessible parking spaces and drop-off points.

- Offer transport assistance (e.g., ridesharing, reimbursement for taxis).

- Consider hybrid/remote options for those unable to attend in person.

Inclusive Event Checklist

Venue & Logistics

Quiet Spaces

- Designate a quiet, low-traffic area for sensory breaks.

- Provide comfortable seating and reduce bright lights/noise distractions.

- Communicate the availability of quiet spaces to attendees in advance.

Communication & Invitations

Use Inclusive Language

- Keep wording simple, direct, and free from jargon or corporate buzzwords.

- Use gender-neutral language ("Hi team" instead of "Hey guys").

Provide Multiple Formats

- Ensure event details are available in accessible digital formats (e.g., screen reader-friendly).

- Offer large print, braille, or audio versions where needed.

- Include captions or transcripts for any video content.

- Translate materials if attendees speak different languages.

On-the-Day Practicalities

Pronouns & Name Tags

- Offer optional pronoun stickers or spaces on name tags.

- Use gender-neutral greetings (e.g., "Welcome everyone").

- Ensure staff respect people's choices regarding pronoun disclosure.

Inclusive Event Checklist

On-the-Day Practicalities

Food & Dietary Considerations

- [ ] Clearly label all food and drinks with allergens and dietary suitability.

- [ ] Provide separate areas for different dietary needs to avoid cross-contamination.

- [ ] Ensure catering staff are informed about dietary requirements.

Diverse Formats & Activities

- [ ] Offer a mix of interactive, physical, and seated activities to cater to different energy levels.

- [ ] Ensure activities are accessible to all physical abilities.

- [ ] Provide quiet, observational roles for those who prefer lower-energy engagement.

Alternative Participation Options

- [ ] Offer written or digital contribution methods (e.g., sticky notes, chat function, live polls).

- [ ] Ensure activities are inclusive for introverts and neurodivergent attendees.

- [ ] Provide seating and flexible arrangements for those who need it.

Post-Event Follow-Up

Gather Feedback

- [ ] Send an anonymous post-event survey covering inclusivity, accessibility, and engagement.

- [ ] Hold focus groups with diverse attendees to gain in-depth insights.

- [ ] Ask about the effectiveness of accessibility features.

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Inclusive Event Checklist

Post-Event Follow-Up

Reflect & Improve

- [ ] Analyse feedback to identify patterns and areas for improvement.

- [ ] Adjust logistics and formats based on feedback for future events.

- [ ] Share key learnings with leadership or D&I teams.

Recognise Contributions

- [ ] Thank attendees, speakers, and organisers in an inclusive way.

- [ ] Highlight diverse voices in post-event communications.

- [ ] Showcase changes made based on attendee input to demonstrate commitment.

Final Check: Have You...

- Considered accessibility, religious, and cultural needs?

- Provided multiple attendance options (e.g., virtual, hybrid, in-person)?

- Ensured diverse engagement opportunities for different energy levels?

- Sent clear, inclusive communications in multiple formats?

- Planned a follow-up to reflect and improve future events?

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