Accessible Formats

Accessing information can be difficult for some people with a disability. Providing information in a variety of formats increases access and extends the audience.

'Accessible format' is the term used to describe alternative communication formats that increase access to information for people with a disability. Sometimes the term 'alternative formats' is used.

An accessible format document is one that is written without jargon and designed so the text is more readable. Assistive technology and software such as screen-reading software or computer-generated voice technology can also improve access to information.

Commonly used accessible formats include:

- Large print — typically a minimum of font size 16 is used, but this can be customised to suit individual requests.

- Audio, such as CD or podcast; this format is most useful if the information can be read from beginning to end without needing to refer to other parts of the document.

- Braille is a system of writing used by people who are blind. When preparing information to be brailled, keep the document layout as simple as possible, as this aids transcription. There are organisations that can help produce Braille text.

- Easy English is a simplified form of plain English that is used for written information. Easy English is helpful for people with a cognitive or intellectual disability or low English language literacy levels. Clear and simple words and short sentences are used, and in many cases pictures and photographs are used to illustrate sentences. Developing Easy English documents is a specialised skill and it is advisable to contact an expert to produce documents.

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- Videos and DVDs with captions and audio description.

Availability of accessible formats

It is unnecessary to produce all documents in accessible formats. The most appropriate formats can vary according to an individual's specific communication needs. Organisations are, however, encouraged to identify key documents, and produce or prepare those documents in accessible formats — for example, produce a master copy in audio or Braille. This enables them to respond to requests for accessible formats in a timely manner and reduces the need to store large quantities which may go unused.

Advertise or promote the availability of accessible formats by a short statement or paragraph. In a publication this statement is often located on the inside front or back cover. It tells people how they can obtain an accessible format of the publication. This is referred to as an 'accessibility tag'.

Readable standard print

Many people in the community find small and elaborate printing difficult to read. Making documents more readable will reduce the need for accessible alternative versions. Below are a number of recommendations to make standard print more readable:

- Use a minimum type size of 12 font.

- Use plain fonts such as Arial. These are often described as 'sans serif' (without the small curls or decorative features).

- Avoid using blocks of text written in capital letters. Information is easier to read for people with a vision impairment if it is written using a mix of upper and lower case.

- Use plain English — for example, short sentences with no jargon and clear headings.

- Avoid using underlining or italics, and use bold to emphasise text instead.

- Separate paragraphs with blank lines to make it easier to find the start of the next paragraph.

- Justify margins on the left hand side and leave the right hand margin unjustified.

- Use contrasting colours to increase readability — for example, black text on a white background is preferable or another high contrast alterative.

- Do not place text over pictures, photos or other images, as this makes the text hard to read.

- When providing a link to a PDF document, also provide an alternative accessible format such as Word or HTML.

- Limit the use of tables. Where tables are used, design the content so that it is suitable for screen-reading software — for example, by repeating the name of the column in each cell.

Further information

Refer to the Office for Disability guide, "Inclusive consultation and communication with a disability". This guide is available to download at:
www.officefordisability.vic.gov.au/research_and_resources.htm#communication

See also: Office for Disability fact sheet: "Accessible Web Sites"
www.officefordisability.vic.gov.au.

If you would like to receive this document in an accessible format, contact the Office for Disability:
Telephone: (03) 9208 3015   **Email:** OFD@dpcd.vic.gov.au
TTY: (03) 9208 3631   **Fax:** (03) 9208 3633

This material has been produced by the Office for Disability, Department of Human Services, for use by VicHealth as part of the 'Everyone Wins' framework.