



Crip Up Climate Conversations: Coproducting a community climate action plan

Guidance on how to write a community climate action
plan by and for Disabled people.

Written by Emma Geen of Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership and
Sensing Climate, Amy Harrison of Bristol Climate & Nature
Partnership, and Sarah Bell of Sensing Climate.

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Climate and Disability



Sensing
Climate



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1. Introduction

1.1. The Bristol Community Climate Action project

This guide is informed by insights developed in Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership's (the Partnership) **Community Climate Action Project**. The Community Climate Action Project is an ambitious, citywide programme funded by the National Lottery's Climate Action Fund that demonstrates the important role communities can play in achieving the city's climate and nature ambitions, whilst also improving people's quality of life.

To date the project has supported 17 communities across Bristol to coproduce a series of community climate action plans. A community climate action plan is a plan that sets out actions that can be taken to respond to both the social and climate priorities of the community. The plans were developed through widespread and sustained community engagement by and with diverse communities across the city. The project worked with geographic communities experiencing inequality and demographic communities, with the latter supporting coproduction of a plan by and for the city's community of Disabled people and another by and for the community of refugees and migrants in the city.





The project was supported by Bristol City Council and the Centre for Sustainable Energy and has developed a repeatable model for place-based, community-led climate action.

Work on the plans was carried out by experienced and trusted community organisations which exist to represent each specific community. Leading climate action at a community level provided opportunities to improve the lives of local people and ensured the needs of Bristol's diverse communities are better represented as the city responds to the climate and nature crises. Community organisations hosted accessible climate conversations exploring the themes of transport, energy, food, waste, nature, buildings, jobs/economy and inequality. These conversations enabled each community to create a unique set of climate priorities as part of a comprehensive community climate action plan.

Representatives from these organisations, including three representatives from the community of Disabled people, also sit on the Community Leadership Panel. Citywide climate and nature plans were brought to this plan for feedback on how they should be carried out in the most just and positive way for communities.

The plan by and for Bristol's community of Disabled people created as part of this project was, to our knowledge, the first community climate action plan to be developed by and for Disabled people in the world. The work was initiated by Laura Welti and carried out by Emma Geen (both Disabled women) for Bristol Disability Equality Forum (BDEF) across 2020 and 2021.

Knowledge about the connection between disability and climate is growing all the time, so in 2024-2025 the plan was updated. This work was led again by Emma Geen as part of Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership's Climate and Disability programme. The plan update was carried out over 7 sessions



and involved working in depth with a steering group of 10 Disabled people ([the Climate and Disability Forum](#)). Two public outreach events were also hosted to invite feedback from the broader community of Disabled people across Bristol.

At the time of writing, the Bristol plan remains the only existing community climate action plan by and for Disabled people in the UK. This is deeply concerning and something which rapidly needs to change given the importance of community climate action plans for ensuring community representation in climate action and that Disabled people are disproportionately disadvantaged by climate change. This guide has been produced in the hope that it can support Disabled people from other areas to create their own community climate action plan.

1.1.1 The Sensing Climate project

This guide has been written in partnership with the '[Sensing Climate](#)' research project; a five-year project funded from 2023 - 2028 by UK Research and Innovation and the Leverhulme Trust to explore how to ensure that responses to the climate crisis in the UK and Ireland help to build fairer communities that take into account the priorities and insights of Disabled people.





1.1.2 Context

This guide is based on work delivered in the UK and primarily tailored to people working in these geographical contexts; recognising that every country has different laws, policies, structures, movements and opportunities, such that one size will not fit all. But we hope that elements of the guide will still be useful and could be used by people in other contexts developing their own guidance to initiate discussions and coproduce community climate action plans around disability and climate worldwide.

While Bristol's Disabled people's community climate action plan itself is specific to the local context, many localities are likely to find that the aims and actions within it are relevant to their areas. We understand that it takes considerable time, effort and resource to produce a detailed plan and so we invite you to use our plan as inspiration, a springboard or a template, drawing on the aims and actions if they are useful. We kindly request that your plan credits any work that is informed by Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership's Community Climate Action Project. You can contact the Partnership to discuss how best to approach this if helpful via email: contact@bristolclimatenature.org.

The Partnership has also produced several insight reports during the project that you may find useful to refer to. You can find these in the [resources library](#) on Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership's website.

1.2. Why is it important to think about disability in climate change?

The climate crisis poses major risks to people and places worldwide. It is deepening and creating new forms of social inequality. Anxieties around life and loss in an unpredictable climate are growing, shifting our sense of home and how we live in our communities.



Disabled people – including 16% of the global population and 24% of the UK population – are already more likely to be on the frontlines of adverse climate impacts, especially in the Global South. More frequent and intense extreme weather only heightens the state of crisis that many Disabled people know too well. Indeed, Disabled people are 2-4 times more likely to die or be injured in heatwaves, hurricanes and floods.

In part, such risks are linked to the damaging impacts of extreme weather events and air pollution on existing health conditions. For example, people with spinal cord injury have difficulties maintaining a safe body temperature, such that heat waves are particularly challenging. Similarly, people with respiratory and cardiovascular conditions are more susceptible to the risks of wildfire smoke.

Consistent with medical models of disability that frame disability as a deficit of individual people, these detrimental outcomes are often accepted as somehow '*inevitable*' consequences of life with impairment. However, this framing overlooks the role of exclusionary social, physical, economic and political structures in *creating* climate vulnerability amongst Disabled people.





For example, Disabled people are more likely than non-disabled people to live in ground floor, level access properties at risk of flooding. Disabled people, both in the UK and worldwide, have also been unable to access evacuation warnings, emergency transport, shelters or health care in the context of extreme weather events.

Climate risks including, for example, anxieties about climate change and the physical, financial and emotional impacts of extreme weather events, are exacerbated by eco-ableism. That is, the failure to include Disabled people in climate action or to recognise that some of the actions promoted to address the climate emergency are creating new challenges for Disabled people. The introduction of Clean Air Zones, for example, may help to reduce air pollution but must be accompanied by reliable, accessible public transport systems, alongside appropriate exemptions for Disabled people who cannot use these systems or afford to purchase low emission vehicles.

According to the World Health Organisation, almost everyone will temporarily or permanently experience disability at some point in their life. The ways in which we change society to meet climate goals now will shape the health, environment, employment opportunities and lifestyles of everyone born today for the rest of their lives.

1.3. Disability and climate governance

In July 2019, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on climate change and disability rights. This resolution called on governments to adopt a disability-inclusive approach to climate adaptation; an approach that 'empowers persons with disabilities as agents of change to address the harmful effects of climate change in their day-to-day lives'.



Yet, there is little evidence of this happening in practice. An analysis of national climate policies by McGill University and the International Disability Alliance highlights that countries are largely neglecting their responsibilities to respect, protect or fulfil disability rights through national climate policies. When considered, for example in the UK's Third National Adaptation Programme, Disabled people are typically listed as one of several 'climate vulnerable' groups. This framing – alongside the tendency of policy makers to focus on individualised forms of pro-environmental behaviour change as a response to the climate crisis – does little to address the specific social or political conditions that create vulnerability. It also fails to recognise the potential contributions of Disabled people as knowledgeable agents of change, as vital actors in the collective and just transition to low carbon, climate resilient societies..

The UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly now recognise the universal human right to a healthy environment, including rights to a safe climate. In the context of our rapidly changing climate, it is essential to protect these rights and ensure a just transition for everyone; a move away from fossil fuel reliance in ways that benefit people who are most at risk and do not cause further harm to people or planet. Beyond the moral





imperative to 'leave no-one behind', an inaccessible approach to climate action will limit the number of people who can inform, contribute to and progress the transformations required.

1.4. This guidance: beyond the single story of vulnerability

Stories have powerful effects on how we understand the world. They may echo existing stereotypes and expectations of how people live – or 'should' live – in the world. Alternatively, they can be used to resist these; to reimagine difference, open new possibilities and expand whose lives, and ways of living, are valued and respected. Stories can work to bring people together or act to create distance.

The single story of 'disability as vulnerability' flattens a rich diversity of disability knowledge and experience and closes down opportunities to imagine climate resilient *and* inclusive worlds. Through this 'Crip Up Climate Conversations' guidance series, we share new stories of climate and disability and new ways of understanding Disabled people in the context of the climate crisis.

We also highlight opportunities to initiate respectful conversations about disability and the climate crisis without polarising or marginalising people; conversations that need to happen to inform transformative, collective climate action that genuinely leaves no one behind.

The guidance is accompanied by a Plain English glossary and three additional guidance notes for people who would like to raise discussions about climate and disability with:

- Disabled people and people involved in the disability movement;
- people in environmental and climate movements;
- policy and decision makers.



1.5. From stories to action

Yet for a climate just future for Disabled people to be brought to life, it is essential to move beyond stories into action. Bottom-up action must be supported in a way that enables a community of Disabled people to narrate their own story within the frame of climate change. The recommended path for this is to create a community climate action plan.

A community climate action plan is a document that is co-produced by a community with the aim of understanding and advocating for climate action that needs to take place within their local context to ensure that climate action creates co-benefits for their community and avoids new barriers being created for them. Normally this plan takes the form of a list of actions that a community intends to take on climate action. Yet communities of Disabled people are likely to find that just climate action requires shifts that are outside of their sphere of control, for example large-scale infrastructure projects like the improvement of pavements. So, a community climate action plan by a community of Disabled people is likely to include both actions that are owned by the community and those they are asking their council and other local stakeholders to own and implement.

Through this guide we use identity-first language ('Disabled people', 'Disabled person') to reflect the terminology used (at the time of writing) by the majority of the disability movement in the UK, where the Community Climate Action and Sensing Climate projects are largely based. This language is informed by the social model of disability; the social model is rooted in the disability rights movement. It makes a distinction between impairment (an embodied condition) and disability (societal barriers and discrimination). It recognises society as disabling and demonstrates that people with different impairments may face common problems e.g. lack of access to information and communication, environmental exclusion and discrimination in employment. It moves away from a position of locating shortcomings within



a disabled individual and argues that impairment is and always will be present in society. It calls for disabling barriers to societal participation to be removed, and for systemic changes to the ways in which Disabled people are treated. In the UK, identity-first language is used to emphasise that people are primarily disabled by society and exclusionary environments, policies and norms, rather than by individual impairments.

However, we also respect the preferences of many people worldwide for person-first language ('people/ person(s) with disabilities'), which is used in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Reflecting a human rights model of disability, the UNCRPD seeks to progress disability policy and law in ways that align with key human rights principles.

The guidance series is called 'Crip Up Climate Conversations'. The term 'crip' has been reclaimed within disability activist communities in recent years to signal political resistance and community affiliation. It is used to affirm disability as a desirable part of the world and to recognise that more inclusive, accessible worlds are possible. However, its use is not universal and should not be imposed on Disabled people who are uncomfortable with its origins. By 'Crip Up' we are talking about Disabled community reclaiming space within climate conversations, amplifying and having our leadership taken seriously.

When working with Disabled people, it is important not to make assumptions about individual language or communication preferences. Always take the time to ask the individual and respect their preferences. Even in a UK context, some people prefer to be called a 'person with disability/disabilities' and many people who would have every right to identify as a Disabled person may not think of themselves in this way.



1.7. Jargon Buster

Using Plain English and writing Plain English versions of documents is an essential part of making climate change work accessible. Jargon is often difficult to understand amongst people who do not work in the sector and can exclude them from the conversation. We have therefore written a Plain English glossary – or 'jargon buster' – to accompany this guidance, which offers possible alternatives to technical terms that you might wish to use. We discuss the use of this further in Section 4.





2. What does a community climate action plan look like?

A community climate action plan can take many forms. For example, it can be a document, a video, or a piece of audio. It can be a list of 10 priority actions or much longer. At its heart, a community climate action plan is a piece of media that captures and collates the views of a specific community on how action can be taken by their community supported by other local stakeholders, such as the council. These actions should have benefits for climate, nature and their community. It may also include actions that need to be taken to avoid new barriers being created for a specific community because of local action on climate change being undertaken by stakeholders outside of the community.

Below is an explanation of the structure used in the Bristol Disabled people's community climate action plan as an example of a structure you could use for your plan.





The plan is split into the following themes:

General: This was section was introduced by the steering group during the plan update as a place to put aims that are about approach, and so relevant to all sections, but also as a place to acknowledge shifts that are needed to enable actions in the plan that are beyond the scope of local government and organisations. For example, for Disabled people to have the capacity to think about climate action then they need appropriate welfare payments to be safeguarded. It's not within the resources or remit of a local authority to decide on how a payment like a Personal Independence Payment is awarded but we can ask for people reading the plan to advocate for the rights of Disabled people and against cuts to such payments when they have a platform to do so.

Being prepared as communities: This was what our steering group decided to name 'resilience' for accessibility purposes.

Energy.

Food.

Nature.

Business, skills and education

Housing.

Transport.

Waste.

It may make sense for your local context to change, add or remove themes to this list. Some other community groups in Bristol added 'community engagement' as a separate them.

Some actions were relevant to multiple sections but we aimed to locate actions in the section that fit best and to refer to actions in other sections if necessary.



In each theme section there is a list of aims. The priorities are what the community wants and needs to happen, for example 'All new transport projects to be accessible'. Beneath the priorities are lists of actions that either add more detail or specify what change is needed for the priorities to be realised, for example for exemptions to be given to specific groups of Disabled people in the measures implemented as part of liveable neighbourhoods initiatives.

The priorities are split into those that are 'city owned' and 'community owned'. We took this approach as it became clear early on in engagement that the vast majority of changes that Disabled people need in order to take part in climate action lie outside our control. For example, for many Disabled people to drive less we would need Bristol's pavements to be improved to enable more walking, wheeling and rolling. Obviously a major, citywide infrastructure project is far beyond the scope of both individual Disabled people and disabled people's organisations (DPOs) or charities. So 'city owned' actions are the changes that the community needs to happen but that we are asking the city to make. By the city, we were referring to any stakeholders with influence over the action – from local authorities, to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to the general public. Communities have a role in advocating for 'city owned' aims but cannot be responsible for them. We deemed it important that the plan still captures these actions to raise awareness of the work that needs to happen.

'Community owned' are the priorities that the Community Climate Action Project aimed to action via projects in collaboration with the community of Disabled people based on the first version of the plan. As this approach makes a plan much longer than one that focuses on the specific projects a community aims to action, the Bristol plan also included a list of top 10 aims. The steering group struggled to create this list as there are far more than 10 essential actions in the plan. The top 10 doesn't reflect the most important aims, so much as the strategic aims that would make the most change if implemented first.



3. Who should write a plan and why?

Creating a community climate action plan well requires a considerable investment of resource budget and capacity – this may initially feel daunting. However, we believe it's important and worthwhile work for people working in the disability sector for the following reasons:



Strategic influence: Publishing a plan is an impactful way of outlining the changes needed by a community. Community climate action plans can be spread widely and easily, in a format that engages key decision-makers and stakeholders.



Securing funding: Funders are often keen to fund projects that can clearly demonstrate community need and desire. A coproduced community climate action plan that stipulates the need for a specific project is far more likely to secure funding than one that cannot demonstrate community backing. There is a lot more funding currently available for climate change projects than there is disability funding. Climate action projects by and for Disabled people are often projects that, at their heart, are projects about improving everyday accessibility and participation opportunities, both in our current climate and as it changes. The investments being made now to decarbonise and improve the climate resilience of our communities offer an invaluable opportunity to address accessibility issues and experiences of exclusion amongst Disabled people; if done in an inclusive way, such efforts will future-proof these investments for future populations who will experience more disability and impairment due to the adverse impacts of climate change and our ageing societies.



A tool for asserting the importance of Disabled people within climate change work: Sadly, Disabled people are often forgotten in climate change work. The process of creating a plan and the plan itself will do vital awareness raising work and create a concrete document that can be carried into a variety of spaces where the insights and ideas of Disabled people can otherwise be overlooked or excluded.



A tool for building climate awareness and agency in the community of Disabled people: Disabled people have been left out of the conversation on climate change for a long time. That means that activating the community on the issue of climate change needs dedicated time and engagement, such as that carried out through creating a community climate plan. Many Disabled people care about climate action but do not have a sense of agency within the conversation. Creating a climate plan together is an excellent way to empower people. Many Disabled people who worked on the Bristol community climate action plan reported that it 'gave me a voice' and that it was a 'privilege'.



Educating: The plan is a vital resource that can educate and inform local organisations, from politicians to NGOs, working on climate change action on how to approach their work. Other local action plans, policies and processes, will be able to formally refer back to the document when designing their work.



Securing future work for disability organisations: With the awareness that environmental projects need input from the community of Disabled people in order to be successful, comes opportunities for disability organisations to be involved in future climate projects. Environmental organisations are likely to commission disability organisations to be partners or consultants. Local authorities may commission access audits for future projects. It is important that the resource for such advice and input goes to those who are best placed to provide it – communities of Disabled people – rather than non-Disabled consultants with little insight or direct lived experience of disability.



Building allyship: Many environmental organisations do not have experiences of the barriers and difficulties that Disabled people face. Creating a community climate action plan can raise awareness and understanding of how disability and environmental issues intersect. This can win the disability movement important and influential allies. In Bristol the work of creating the plan has rippled outwards and encouraged the local nature festival to create a series of events designed for Disabled people, a parks charity to focus on work with Disabled people, a local political party to ask for briefings and embark on a push to recruit more Disabled councillors, and a council board to formally consult DPOs before every meeting, among other changes. Politicians who have an environmental agenda will often not think about disability issues of their own accord, but if you draw the links for them between accessibility and successful climate action then you can win powerful allies to advocate for the community of Disabled people.

It is the firm belief of the people behind the Bristol Community Climate Action Project that, though climate action risks creating new barriers for Disabled people, the climate transition is the greatest opportunity we will have in our lifetimes to make our society accessible. If we are investing large sums of money and effort in changing how people get around our city to slow down and adapt to climate change, it would not take that much more effort to make this transport accessible at the same time. If new jobs are created around climate change action, these jobs could be used to help close the disability employment gap. If we're retrofitting social housing to reduce energy use, then we can also embed accessibility adaptations and save Disabled people money on their energy bills.

There are huge potential wins for the community of Disabled people within this work but only if carried out in a way that meets the needs of the local community of Disabled people. The best first step in understanding how to meet these needs is to coproduce a community climate action plan.



3.2. What kind of organisation should do this work?

The maxim of the disability movement is 'nothing about us without us'. To create a community climate action plan well requires an organisation that knows how to reach the local community of Disabled people, engage with them from a foundation of trust and create genuinely enabling conditions for engagement. The best kind of organisation to do this work is a Disabled People's Organisation (DPO). This is an organisation made up of a majority of Disabled staff. A disability organisation that is well respected among the community of Disabled people is also well placed to do this work.

A community climate action plan should represent all Disabled people in the community so the organisation should also be one that represents all local Disabled people, rather than an impairment-specific group. An impairment-specific group can create its own action plan for its members, but bear in mind that local stakeholders and politicians will likely be most engaged by and interested in a plan that represents a larger segment of the community.

Similarly, a non-constituted group of local Disabled people could carry out the work but should be cautioned that creating the plan is a large undertaking and is most feasible when funding and staff time can be secured.





An organisation that is not disability specific, such as an environmental charity, could carry out the work if the project is held by Disabled staff. However, this should only be attempted when it has not been possible to find a disability organisation to hold it and when good links into the community of Disabled people and a deep understanding of accessibility exists within the organisation. The organisation should also approach the project with an openness to improving its accessibility work and an understanding that working with Disabled people will often call for extra time, funding and support than its standard operations. The organisation should be aware that changes will likely be needed in:



Communication: Communication will need to prioritise accessible language and may require changes in communication style. Accessibility must always be considered a priority.



Safeguarding policy: The work may involve contact with people who are more at risk than an environmental charity is familiar with engaging with. Policies and processes must in place to reduce risk, and for when incidences arise.



Payment: Pay for many members of the public who engage with the project will likely be through vouchers rather than money, to ensure any benefits are unaffected. An organisation that isn't familiar with this work will need to put payment processes in place and dedicate staff time to ordering these. This administrative work is often more time consuming than organisations anticipate.



Support for staff: The Disabled staff running the project may need adjustments and accommodations. It is vital that the Disabled members of staff are given adequate time and support within the organisation for them to be able to make the project's outward work accessible. Support must include a willingness to listen to and respond to accessibility issues when raised. It can be stressful and take a lot of emotional labour for a Disabled member of staff to raise and continue raising accessibility issues with their employer.



3.2.1 Collaboration

This work straddles both the disability and the climate sectors so most organisations are likely to find that they have knowledge gaps. It is therefore often helpful for a project to be carried out collaboratively between organisations. The best setup would be for a DPO to lead the work, with an environmental organisation providing support, but this could work the other way around provided an enabling environment is created and sustained.

A plan has a better chance of leading to action, and of identifying where action can be taken, if the local authority is bought into the project early on. The Bristol Community Climate Action Project has Bristol City Council as a core partner. Even though the council made no formal commitment to carry out the asks that would be developed through the plans, they committed to being an enabler, and having them as a formal partner meant that a council contact was on hand to support with navigation of council departments and key contacts and to open doors where necessary.

These partnerships will need to be factored into funding bids when developing proposals to support this work.





4. Before you start

Creating a community climate action plan should not be seen as a daunting project but it does require careful planning from the outset to be successful.

4.1. Funding

As previous sections have mentioned, this work requires proper investment. You will need funds to pay staff, Disabled people for taking part, collaborators, engagement materials, venues for events and a generous accessibility pot. We recommend ringfencing an accessibility pot to ensure there are always funds for any unforeseen access needs.

Many national trusts and foundations are now viewing climate as a key funding priority. They also often prioritise projects that positively impact communities which are experiencing disadvantage. Therefore, projects which focus on both climate and communities of Disabled people may be viewed positively and meet funding criteria. Be aware that it is important to be able to evidence need, interest and an established network of support in funding bids.

The National Lottery Community Fund has been a strong supporter of this work on Bristol and has a [range of ongoing programmes](#).

4.2. Getting buy in

Plans will have the greatest chance of success if they involve the local authority and key local climate and nature stakeholders from the start. Taking the time to build constructive and trusted relationships with these organisations is essential. Holding a stakeholder roundtable event to enable key local stakeholders to help review and refine the draft version of plan priorities can be helpful.



4.3. Staff

As mentioned in the last section, this work should be led by Disabled people. Community engagement is only successful if there is a good understanding of how to engage with Disabled people on their terms and in a respectful way. Many Disabled people are also more likely to trust another Disabled person with the personal and difficult conversations required to create a plan.

However, this doesn't mean that any Disabled person is the right fit for the role. As well as lived experience of disability, the member of staff needs a good understanding of the range of different types of impairment and intersectional barriers within the community, and how to navigate these varied experiences to create inclusive enabling opportunities for engagement. This knowledge can, and will, be grown throughout the project. However, if the member of staff doesn't have a good understanding at the start, then disability training (ideally designed and led by Disabled people) is useful. This should all be held in mind during recruitment processes or when assigning an existing member of staff to the project.





When recruiting a new staff member, understand that it can take time for job adverts to reach the right Disabled people and that it can take Disabled people more time than is often allocated to build up the confidence to apply. This extra time needs to be factored into your timelines.

If you're not a disability organisation than ensure you pay one with good networks to get your advert into the right spaces. Recruitment is a process with many barriers for Disabled people so make the process as easy and accessible as possible, and ensure you factor in the costs of accessibility adjustments into your recruitment budgets (e.g. the cost of inviting a sign language interpreter to the interview, or taxi fares for Disabled applicants if held in person etc.)

Once the member of staff is employed, the organisation must ensure that they swiftly put into place any accommodations that the Disabled person needs. While in theory there is Government support for these accommodations, these cannot be relied on. For example, unfortunately there are ongoing issues with the Government Access to Work initiative that are creating significant barriers for Disabled employees whose employers cannot fund adjustments without this support.

It is also very beneficial to put in place structures of emotional support so the individual can remain resilient when faced with the difficult situations and conversations that are likely to arise when engaging with the community of Disabled people on climate change.



4.4. Plan of action

Though a certain amount of flexibility will be required throughout the project for unseen circumstances, it is vital that there is a clear plan of action for the development of the plan from the start of the project. This should include a timeline, plan of engagement activities, structure for the steering group, and process for writing the plan. Details of these activities can and will be refined through the process, however. It will be helpful to factor in leeway for the engagement in case it emerges that there is an important gap in the types of people who have been engaged with, or if the people involved need more time (e.g. around fluctuating health conditions or other unforeseen circumstances) to contribute in a way that they feel is meaningful. It is sensible to leave details of the launch until the engagement process is over and there is a shared understanding of how to put the plan out into the world for most impact.





5. Communicating with Disabled people about climate

Disabled people have been excluded from the environmental movement for a long time. From an environmental perspective, this means the movement has missed out on the skills, wisdom, and passion that Disabled people have to offer. From the disability perspective, this means that Disabled people have been distanced from the movement. Conversations have not been brought to them, language is often inaccessible, and much of the data and research necessary to understand the full impact of the issue on the community is missing. The knowledge of how to carry out community climate and environmental work in an accessible way has therefore been largely absent from decision-making processes and has led to eco-ableism. Anything that can be said of the community of Disabled people is a generalisation, but there can be a tendency to distrust the environmental movement because of these failures.

In a 2021 study conducted by the Research Institute for Disabled Consumers (RiDC), 97% of Disabled and older people expressed environmental concerns and 95% said they tried to be 'greener' at home, but 17% felt unable to contribute as much as they would like. The wide range of barriers that Disabled people experience in daily life and the high levels of poverty and exclusion in the community mean that environmental and climate considerations are in competition with a wide range of other existential threats for the attention of Disabled people.

With regard to climate considerations, emergency and extreme weather responses are already a key priority for many disability organisations, especially in the Global South and are becoming an increasing concern in the UK and elsewhere too. Disabled people are also very heavily impacted by energy poverty and by the consequences of unreliable access to energy supplies. Even if people in the disability movement are not yet talking to the wider climate justice movement, this does not necessarily mean that they are not thinking about or involved in other areas of climate work.



5.1. Flipping the narrative

While it's important to recognise the extra risks posed to Disabled people by climate change, it is unhelpful to approach discussions about disability and the climate crisis by focusing solely on vulnerability. Here we suggest some alternative narratives to consider in how Disabled people are framed in relation to the climate crisis when approaching Disabled people and/or Disabled People's Organisations.



“The best opportunity to make an accessible society in our lifetime. Big changes are coming to our country and communities to slow down and adapt to climate change. These changes will impact everything, from roads, to buses, to how we heat our homes, to the jobs we do. Doing this work in the right way would mean making changes that are good for both the planet and people. There will be a lot of money put into them and it wouldn't cost much more to make these things accessible at the same time. The journey will be complex and will not always be easy. Disabled people have to be involved if we want to avoid new barriers and create new benefits. If we are part of making the changes, then this could be the biggest opportunity to make our society accessible in our lifetimes”.



“Disability wisdom and living within limits. Disability forces people to understand limits. It shows us that bodies and minds cannot do everything. It makes Disabled people learn how to properly rest and push back against the idea that we should always do more. But it also teaches us to push back against unfair limits that try to stop us from living good lives and being able to do the things we can do. The ways of living and organising society that are driving climate change do not recognise or respect limits. They are pushing the planet beyond what is healthy in the long-term by always taking more. These ideas push people to work more and harder. They tell people that they can do anything if they work hard enough. These ideas are hurting people, the planet and other species. To stop the harm, we have to learn from the wisdom of Disabled people about when to stop and also when to push back and demand better” (this narrative is adapted from an article by Julia Watts Belser).



5.2. Initiating discussion with Disabled people

Given the challenges discussed above and others, initiating discussions with Disabled people on climate and wider environmental issues can be difficult. Attempting discussions without previous education and awareness-raising about climate change may mean you receive a poor or lukewarm response. In most cases your best conversation starter is to connect the issue to the priority concerns that already exist in the community. We recognise that climate and environmental organisations often organise along quite separate tracks but below we suggest a range of entry points that you might like to consider for different climate or environmental issues, depending on your areas of work.



Sustainable transport linked to accessible transport. For many Disabled people, transport is a priority issue as inaccessible transport is one of the main barriers that prevents community and society engagement. By talking about improving the accessibility of transport, you can draw links to the ways in which these improvements could work in coalition with sustainable transport. Care is required here to ensure that the changes you advocate for are accessible, will not create new barriers and avoid shaming people who cannot take the most sustainable action. For instance, while a reduction in cars on the road would be beneficial for Disabled people in many ways, some Disabled people will never be able to use public transport or active transport, meaning that it is important to refer to 'low car' travel rather than 'no car' travel.



Retrofitting sustainable energy measures linked to affordable energy. If approached in the right way, the energy transition to a low carbon society should lead to more affordable energy. Across the world, the energy crisis means that many Disabled people are experiencing severe energy poverty. For example, in the UK, in the poorest 20% of households, disabled households set aside more of their budget for energy than non-disabled households ([Scope 2023](#)). This is partly due to the high levels of unemployment in the community but also because some Disabled people have additional energy costs due to running adaptive devices, washing clothing and bedding more frequently or having to heat their homes to a temperature required by specific impairments. By beginning the conversation with this recognition and showing how retrofit and sustainable energy measures can save Disabled people money on their energy bills, you can join the two conversations.



Green jobs linked to closing the disability employment gap. In the UK, the disability employment gap stands at 28.9%, with the employment rate standing at 53.6% for Disabled people and 82.5% for non-disabled people. This gap accounts for a great deal, though not all, of the higher rates of poverty in the community and presents an additional barrier for many Disabled people in being able to engage in society. In discussions about just transition, there is a lot of emphasis placed on the opportunities of new 'green jobs' – jobs that help to protect the environment, including those that involve slowing down and trying to cope with the effects of climate change. If created in an accessible way, green jobs could help to close the disability employment gap. For example, some call centre support could be carried out from home for people who need this flexibility, meanwhile people who find indoor office work inaccessible might benefit from outdoor nature jobs. Doing this work in an accessible way will mean considering the needs of people with varying impairments and supporting people into the new jobs through accessible training pathways.



Emergency preparedness planning. Disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness strategies are integral to climate action to protect people from harm and ensure that extreme weather events and other climate risks do not hinder the implementation of climate solutions. Disabled people are 2-4 times more likely to die or be injured in heatwaves, hurricanes and floods. In part, such risks are due to the damaging impacts of such events on existing health conditions, but they are also due to eco-ableism; the failure to include Disabled people in the design or testing of emergency preparedness planning processes. As extreme weather events and slower onset emergencies (e.g. energy poverty and cold homes) become more common, it is essential that Disabled people are involved in the design and testing of emergency preparedness plans and risk communications, and that emergency response teams know who will need assistance and how best to provide this assistance with care and dignity.



An area to be cautious of is waste. Though successful engagement can be carried out on this front, the opportunities are harder to tease out, and eco-ableism is common across such discussions. For instance, one of the highest profile cases of eco-ableism is the plastic straw ban. This ban made it harder for many Disabled people to access an important assistive tool yet made little meaningful impact on the reduction of plastic pollution. Many Disabled people also have conditions that require them to use medical products that produce a large quantity of plastic waste. Use of these products is essential for health, and sustainable options either do not exist or are unaffordable. For these individuals, forcing a dialogue around reducing single use plastic can be shaming and can suggest that their health is in direct conflict with that of the planet. Unless Disabled people bring up waste directly, it may be more constructive initially to focus engagement on one of the other entry points discussed above.



5.3. Accessible language

Using Plain English and writing Plain English versions of documents is an essential part of making climate change work accessible for Disabled people, and many non-disabled people too! Jargon is often difficult to understand amongst people who do not work in the sector and can exclude them from the conversation. It can be difficult to use Plain English. Often the terms used are technical because the issue is technical and complex and, as many of the issues aren't discussed in everyday life, colloquial alternatives are lacking. The way around this can be to explain the concept as simply as possible instead of using an official term.

We have developed a Plain English glossary to accompany this guidance, which offers some possible alternatives to technical terms that you might wish to use. These alternatives necessarily involve simplifying concepts and might mean loss of nuance, or even essential parts of the concept; so judge their use on a case-by-case basis. Remember that people do not need to know all the information, only what's necessary to be empowered and make informed decisions. For example, instead of 'sustainable', you can say 'good for the planet', which loses a great deal of the word's nuance and flavour but is often the core of what people are trying to





express through its use. Where using some jargon is unavoidable, always explain the concept and use a glossary to explain key terms in documents or – if meeting in-person – on a sheet of paper in the centre of the table for discussions.

It's important to find safe and supportive ways of highlighting when inaccessible language is being used. Sometimes we are not aware that words we use regularly can be unfamiliar to others. Having a 'jargon whistler' or 'jargon busting sound' or a 'red card', which can be raised (as used by a referee), can be playful ways to navigate this issue. Jargon whistling (or jargon busting) is a game that was initiated by disability activist, Beth Richards. You can watch Beth's '[I hate you jargon](#)' video on YouTube via her [YouTube channel](#). A jargon whistler is a person with learning difficulties who is given an instrument to make a sound when inaccessible language is used, which the speaker then uses as a prompt to explain the term more clearly. A jargon busting sound serves a similar role, but all participants are invited to set the sound together at the beginning of the event and use it whenever they notice inaccessible language. Both approaches should be treated as a game to create a fun and safe environment in which participants are able to indicate when explanations are needed and the speaker knows when they need to simplify, without any party experiencing shame.

5.4. Accessible documents

Plain English is important not just for conversations but in all the documents and assets you create too. Even if you have put everything in place to make your session accessible, people will not join it if the poster advertising it is inaccessible!

When making a document accessible you will need to think about word use but also length. Having an executive summary and summary at the head of each section can be helpful for people who struggle with long documents.



If you regularly explain terms, it can make the document too long to engage with fully. If a concept is core to a document, then it is better to use the term and explain it at the start, for example in a glossary that explains what might otherwise be read as jargon. Throughout the document, you can highlight terms in bold text that are explained in the glossary as a reminder that people can find the meaning in the glossary. For example, though we would not normally use a term like 'energy networks' in a Plain English document, for a piece of work consulting Disabled people to understand what they would like from energy networks, we would ensure a glossary is included that offers a clear and simple explanation of key terms.

The risk with these glossaries is that they can become long and tricky to use. While your Plain English documents must always have a glossary, people should not have to refer back to it every few paragraphs. Finding the right balance becomes easier over time and it helps to use tools like the Hemingwayapp.com to assess where your writing has become too complex. It is also good practice to share it with a few other people for their feedback, prioritising both people with a good grasp of the issue and people who are unfamiliar with the jargon.

Creating accessible versions of documents is important, and we recommend creating the following for important documents:

1. Plain English screen-reader friendly version (in PDF and Word formats)
2. BSL video
3. Easy Read
4. Audio versions



Make it clear that other versions are available on request. If you live in an area where many Disabled people are not English speakers, language translations are also important.

We're aware that ordering all the above translations can be costly. So here are some different approaches you can use for each step.



Engagement: A Plain English version of adverts for engagement sessions is often enough. When approaching DPOs that represent people with specific impairments, it can be helpful to ask if they would like a specific translated version for their community.



During sessions: Creating translated versions of draft documents is rarely practical or affordable. If you're working with a specific impairment group it is important to translate for them, for example if you're talking to a group of people with learning disabilities then you will want to bring in Easy Read documents and slides. However, if you're working with a pan-impairment group then it is often best to format your documents as Plain English but book the relevant translators for the session. Read out the document to the group, allowing the translators to translate as you go. Reading out the document will also make it more accessible for lots of other people, for example dyslexic people. Take some time before the meeting to go through the document with people with learning disabilities to ensure they understand the content and feel able to contribute.



Final documents: These are the versions that are essential to translate. Aim to launch all the different versions of the document at the same time. If this is not possible make it very clear when the translated versions will arrive. Make all the translations easy to find.



6. Co-production

Coproduction is vital for creating a meaningful community climate action plan. If it isn't coproduced, then it won't be owned by the community. Yet authentic coproduction, with true equality and sharing of power, is a complex process that requires sensitivity, adaptability, time and openness to change. Coproduction is not a specific technique but rather 'a way of being with and doing with' (Langley et al., 2022: 112). To initiate and engage in a process of coproduction you are advised to refer to the many guides already out there. What we offer below is some advice about working with Disabled people specifically, from the authors' experience of coproduction.

6.1. Approach

Coproduction is a difficult process and there are a wide range of activities that fall within the umbrella. The definition is often contested and what some people call coproduction, others might call codesign or codelivery, or similar terms. Whatever term you are using, aiming for the greatest level of power sharing is encouraged. Power sharing, with joint ownership of the process, is one of five key principles of co-production, alongside efforts to: include the perspectives of all who can make a contribution who may be impacted by the outcome





of a piece of work; value the knowledge of everyone involved in the process, recognising that everyone is equally important; embed reciprocity, such that everyone can benefit from the collaborative process; and build trusting relationships, with clarity over different roles and responsibilities ([Langley et al., 2022](#)).

Dialogue and iteration are integral; taking time to explore and understand different views and priorities, and ensuring this dialogue results in changes in direction in the work and new approaches as needed. There are often practical limits on what is possible due to resources and the difference in what can be expected from staff, paid participants and volunteers. To retain trust and authenticity, it is important to be transparent from the start of the project about how power will be shared, the scope of the work, and the roles and responsibilities of the people involved. This helps set out what a group can expect from you and will settle anxieties about what members will be required to do. It is important that you're open to challenges from the group about power throughout the process, and are willing to engage in discussions with them about ways in which workings can be improved.

Setting expectations about outcomes from the work is equally important. Aspiring for change through the process and engaging in hope and optimism are essential for creating the best possible output. Yet this must be balanced with care to avoid disappointment and loss of trust when aspirations are constrained by practicalities. Many Disabled people will have experienced multiple examples of organisations, government, researchers or consultations 'helicoptering in', engaging in extractive practices and betraying their trust. Invitations to imagine and create plans for improvement can cause distress when held in contrast to the stark and difficult realities of people's lives. Disabled people may also have had limited opportunities to engage in this type of thinking and may need support and encouragement to do this work. Opening up spaces to imagine improvement must be carefully held by framing discussions with reminders about limitations on scope, such as budget, time and other practicalities.

Holding this space well therefore calls for expert facilitators. Mature listening skills are key alongside a level



of understanding that is hard to achieve without lived experience. That said, allyship in this role is possible by individuals who have put a lot of thought and time into understanding the perspectives of Disabled people. Genuine coproduction requires time and resource. As explained below, it is important that people's participation is fully funded, including expenses and time to read and reflect on materials before any meetings about the work.

6.2. Before a meeting/session

Getting the right people in the room is an important piece of work that needs to happen before any coproduction activity. Your group should reflect the make-up of the broader community that you are looking to engage as closely as possible, in both demographics and impairment type. Unless the topic of discussion is related to a specific impairment group, then coproduction groups should be pan-impairment. This may involve, for example, including people with mobility impairments, mental health conditions, sensory impairments, learning difficulties, chronic conditions and people who are d/Deaf or neurodivergent. It's unlikely that you will be able to recruit a group of Disabled people who are all climate change experts but in many cases, it will be beneficial for people who take part to at least have an interest in or concern about climate change issues.





Different Disabled people will have different needs when it comes to accessible language and discussion. Climate change is a complex topic and can require conversations that demand a high level of knowledge and understanding. Making these discussions accessible for everyone can be highly demanding and there will often be limits to how much this is possible while also retaining the level of detail and nuance needed to address an issue. In cases where a discussion will be extremely difficult for some members of the group it may help to have a one-to-one conversation with these people ahead of the main meeting. You can then go through the material at a pace and level that is comfortable for them. Together, or between the individual and their personal assistant (PA), they can identify the points that are important for them to contribute to the meeting so that they can come with a list of these, ensuring that their perspective is heard and that they're included.

Coproduction requires trust between the group and the people facilitating it, as well as between members of the group. It can be helpful to hold a social space for the group before any deliberation starts. Offering a free breakfast or lunch when meeting in person often works well to build trust and appreciation for the time that people have given up to come along (provided dietary and access needs are catered for). It also means that it is more likely people will come to the discussion focussed and excited to begin.

6.3. In coproduction sessions

Engaging in discussion and deliberation may be tricky for some Disabled people in a group, especially if their lived experience has led to chronic lack of confidence and the expectation that their views won't be heard or respected. Build time and facilitation tools into your meeting to support quieter members to feel empowered to talk and to encourage louder members to share space. It can also help to invite them to bring a supportive friend or family member along if they feel nervous. The offer of personal assistance (and, where relevant, sighted support, sign language interpretation etc.) is always important.



The subject matter may also bring up difficult emotions and trauma. It's essential to create space to gently hold feelings that emerge. Chasing a tight agenda and efficiency in the short-term often leads to inefficiency and lack of trust in the long-term, since engagement, hope and empowerment require people to feel properly listened to. However, you will likely need to put facilitation tools in place to prevent some individuals from dominating and continuing to express emotions or thoughts that have already been processed. Some types of impairment can compromise people's awareness or ability to control how they occupy space in a discussion. Take time to co-develop some ground rules at the start of the process to enable people to enter the space in a way that ensures everyone can feel comfortable and no one feels excluded by anyone else.

Where it is clear that an individual is experiencing pain or distress that they need to express before the discussion can move forward, it is worth creating space for one-to-one listening time with that individual outside of the meeting or in a break so that they can engage in a more focussed way. You may find that offering other support for emotions that emerge around the issue is also needed. However, be careful that any mental health first aid is delivered from the perspective of the social model of disability and that staff are trained to offer this support.

Tools that can be helpful for co-production processes include:



A jargon buster sheet: this is a piece of paper that you can add explanations to for jargon, complex words and terms as the sessions go on. It's then left on tables for people to refer to.



Parking lot: This is a piece of paper on the wall that discussion points are added to when they are raised at moments in the meeting when they can't practically be discussed in detail. They can then be returned to when there is an appropriate moment. This means that they won't be forgotten, and the individual can trust that their query or idea is not being ignored.



A jargon whistler/red carding: a 'jargon whistler' has a whistle or other instrument, like a bell, and makes a noise whenever jargon or inaccessible language is used. This playful approach alerts speakers to the need to explain and simplify their language in a way that is not threatening to speakers or listeners. Another option can be for participants to have a piece of red card that they can raise. These options might not be accessible to all participants, and in this case, you can work with the person to find an option that is accessible to them, for example they might choose to make a noise or say 'jargon'. It often helps people to build the confidence to use these tools by practising with them at the start and for facilitators to model using them on each other.



Temperature checks: This is a tool you can use to help the group reach decisions that everyone is happy with, even if further discussion and problem-solving is required. People move their hands up, down or flat, to show how positively or negatively they feel about an idea. This helps the facilitator to identify people who are uncertain or unhappy, and then bring the discussion to them gently to hear problems and find solutions. Where an individual might not be able to make this range of movements you can agree a sound or another way of indicating their feelings with them beforehand. It's important to take the time to explain to visually impaired people (VIP) beforehand what will be happening and for the facilitator to describe the general state of the temperature when it is made to ensure visually impaired collaborators are included. However, the tool is only really for the facilitator to know which individuals to encourage to share so most visually impaired collaborators in our experience don't mind there being a visual element to the tool (unless they are in the facilitation role).



Ground rules: this is a set of rules about how members of the group agree to behave in the space and towards each other in a way that ensures trust, respect and responsibility. It can be helpful to bring a list of pre-suggested ideas that people can then discuss and refine together at the start of the meeting rather than trying to start this process from scratch.



Post-it notes: Encourage people to make notes on post-its as they think of them, which the facilitator can make a point to explore at regular points throughout the discussion.

Even with these tools, decision making can be complex, especially when bringing together a range of views from the broader community or complex data. Sometimes the demands on members to absorb and retain this information can be inaccessible. In these cases, it's important to find ways of supporting the members of the group that are willing to engage with this level of detail to explore the material and condense it, or to discuss it in a way that can reduce the demand on the rest of the group. Where appropriate, the interpretations of a smaller group can be summarised and shared with the broader group for feedback, input and sign off. It may also be helpful for facilitators to process the material before bringing it to the group. If this is the case, they should be transparent about what they have done and the reasoning for any decisions they have made in this work.

People will likely want to be involved in all discussions and parts of decision-making, but this is not always the best way to deliberate, nor is it always practical. Where this is the case, you can explore the potential to set up sub-groups and seek permission from the main group for these to be established. These groups can then discuss specific issues in more detail. It is essential that all the outcomes of these groups are taken back to the main group for feedback, and potentially further discussion and iteration. However, unless there are serious problems, the facilitator should encourage the main group to both discuss and respect the answers that the subgroup has arrived at.

6.4. Steering group

The quality of conversation required for genuine coproduction requires numbers of participants to be kept small. It is important to build a steering group to have an overview of the project, to share guidance and to shape the plan in an in-depth way. Numbers between 8 and 15 will likely allow the group to share



insights informed by experiences of a range of impairments, demographics and life circumstances while making connection and discussion possible. We recommend that you aim for an intersectional and broad cross-section of the community in this group but to be thoughtful about who you invite onto the group. It is easy for one dominant person to make the process extremely difficult, so it is important to prioritise people who are open to working in an empathetic, collaborative way. You might want to put out a simple call of interest for the group. If you offer good pay for this work, as you should, then you are likely to find that you will have a wide range of people to form a group from.

It will be helpful to have this group meet at least once before engagement begins to give feedback and advice on the engagement plans and identify useful connections. It is important to give the group time to develop trust and feel comfortable with each other, and to discuss and sign off on the terms of reference and code of conduct. These introductory processes can take longer than expected so be sure to allow plenty of time.

After the initial meeting, and the engagement phase, the group should meet several times to develop the content of the plan. For the Bristol plan it took on average, an hour to discuss each individual theme with careful facilitation. Finalising the Bristol plan took three hours once the draft text, incorporating the feedback from all previous sessions and public events, had been produced and shared in advance. While the steering group will have a more in-depth steer on the plan, it is not practical for the group to write the plan by committee. Instead, you will need one member of staff to arrange meetings, facilitate the meetings and the discussion points, listen to what has been expressed, and then go away and turn the discussion into formal parts of the plan. For example, during the development of Bristol's Disabled people's community climate action plan, Emma Geen played the role of organising meetings and would bring draft suggestions of plan sections to each meeting (based on community engagement responses and previous versions of the plan). The steering group would then discuss this draft in detail – adding in



new ideas, taking out existing ideas or deciding on word changes. Sometimes, single word choices can be very important. For example, the Bristol group decided to change the section headed 'resilience' (which is a word with difficult connotations in the Disability community as well as being inaccessible jargon) to 'being prepared as communities'.

It is likely that group members will not phrase their comments as specific actions or aims that can be put directly into the plan. Instead, they will share their experiences of specific issues or problems that could be addressed through climate action. It is the facilitator's role to listen and translate these experiences into specific points for the plan. The facilitator can read out how they have done this before the end of the meeting for feedback, and make edits as needed to ensure they have captured the points made to the group's satisfaction. Sometimes further research will be needed to know how best to do this translation work. In these instances, the facilitator can take some time to do this before sharing proposed plan content by email with the group for feedback. In the final meeting together, the facilitator can also read through the whole plan for the group to feedback on any gaps or issues before finalising the document.





Also bear in mind that the role of facilitator can be to gently challenge ideas. You are likely to find that people are keen to see their specific struggles acknowledged or to request the addition of further detail about the history of certain barriers. These experiences must always be honoured, but if a lived experience is already captured elsewhere within the plan or covered by another point then it is acceptable to gently push back against these asks for the sake of making the document focused enough to be usable. It helps to be very clear from the beginning what should go into in the plan and what is outside the scope so that the conversations can be as targeted as possible.

Talking about themes in the plan will undoubtedly spark some difficult memories and group members are likely to need space to share their difficult experiences. This sharing will be useful for the development of the plan and is important for the individual. However, it is the role of the facilitator to strike a thoughtful balance between giving space to this sharing and ensuring that it doesn't prevent efforts to move the plan forward. It can help to indicate when you can only take one more point on a topic before moving on so that people understand that they are not being cut off personally.

When working with Disabled people, it is a common experience that some people may be unable to make many meetings. It is good practice to offer these people a one-to-one meeting to enable them to feed into sections developed during meetings they have missed. However, we recommend having shorter one-to-one meetings with a lower level of financial compensation to encourage people to join the main meeting if they can. This is not to punish steering group members for missed meetings but to gently protect the time and energy of the Disabled staff member or facilitator, as if large numbers of people miss the main meeting, it can overwhelm the capacity of the staff member/facilitator to organise and process multiple one-to-one meetings.



6.5. Getting broader input

While the steering group will play a vital role in developing an in-depth plan, your community climate action plan will need to be informed by and reflect the priorities of as many Disabled people in the community as possible. Surveys and other forms of engagement ([explored in the engagement section](#)) should be used to gather a broader range of views for the focussed steering group to review and create plans from. These outputs can then be shared for feedback at open meetings where the broader community can feedback.

6.6. Using the Bristol plan as a template

Community engagement and steering groups take a considerable amount of time and investment. Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership welcomes other localities to take the Bristol community climate action plan and work with local Disabled people to adapt it to their context to reduce the work involved, provided the original project is properly credited and linked to.

This process could look like:

- An initial survey to invite responses from local Disabled people on what they feel needs to be prioritised in local climate action.
- (Optional) A sharing event to share findings of the survey, build interest in the project and gauge interest from the community for being involved in the steering group.
- A short series of three-hour drafting steering group meetings. These meetings could focus on going through the Bristol plan and identifying changes needed to reflect their local context and priorities.
- Two public engagement sessions to seek wider feedback on the draft plan and proposed priorities. One online and one in person.
- One steering group meeting to finalise the plan.



7. Community engagement

7.1. A varied approach

The community of Disabled people is extremely diverse. Every Disabled person experiences impairment and disability differently and anyone can become disabled, such that the interests, beliefs, passions and dislikes of Disabled people are wide ranging. An event that is interesting and accessible for one Disabled person can be uninspiring and inaccessible for another Disabled person. It therefore helps to have a wide range of engagement approaches in order to give people different ways to engage. You may wish to consider offering the different approaches below:



A survey: This is a good way to invite lots of responses, though will often lack the types of detail and connection that can draw people deeper into the project, as well as excluding people who cannot share their responses via survey platforms. It is important to host surveys on an accessible site, to share them in an accessible format and ensure that people can save their draft responses to finish later. Provide paper copies and offer to support people to fill in the survey over the phone if needed. Unlike most other types of engagement, you don't have to pay people for taking part in a survey. Though if you have a practical way of doing this while ensuring respondents are the people you want to hear from, this is a good thing to offer.



Presentations to existing groups: Bringing together groups of Disabled people can take time and resource. So where there are existing events for Disabled people that are happy to host you, this can be a powerful approach to reach new people. Contact local DPOs to enquire if you can join one of their sessions. Make sure to give the group easy structured ways to discuss the content and to have a way to capture all their insights. It can be helpful to return to these groups to present the draft version of the plan when it is ready for feedback.



Sharing sessions: As mentioned in the communication section, it is far easier to engage Disabled people in conversations around an issue they already care about than a general event on climate change. So you may wish to run sharing events on issues like public transport, jobs or nature. Invite both Disabled people and theme experts to these sessions and make sure to position both parties as holders of equal knowledge. A good structure can be to give the theme experts time to share information about the work that is being done, then give Disabled people space to share their lived experience of barriers, then space for both groups to discuss together how work in the area could be improved. Sessions can feel more engaging if you introduce an engagement tool for the session that matches the theme. For example, you could hold a discussion about food at a community meal. Creativity can help participants approach the issue from fresh angles and in ways that can be less distressing than a direct approach. We discuss creative approaches further below.



Stalls: The Bristol community climate action plan was first produced at the height of the pandemic, at a time when many events and activities had been cancelled, so we had to adapt our engagement ideas. When it is hard to find Disabled people to engage with, you can seek permission to run stalls at places where Disabled people are frequenting. For example, hospitals, doctor's surgeries, supermarkets. The engagement you get through this method will be more hit and miss but is worth attempting when you are struggling to secure responses by any other means. Make sure to have freebies, such as food or small gifts like wild flower seeds, to attract people in, accessible seating, and a clear and accessible flyer with a link and QR code to the survey to take away. It is recommended that you have at least two people working the stall for safety purposes.

The Community Climate Action project insights report on the learning and mentoring programme may be of interest.



7.2. When people struggle for ideas

One of the greatest difficulties about engaging Disabled people in creating a plan is that there is so little awareness of accessibility in climate work and so few accessible examples of climate work, that it can be a struggle for some people to think of ideas to offer. We encourage you to draw examples from ideas in the Bristol community climate action plan to get the ball rolling if this is helpful. Sharing sessions (explained above) can also be useful here, as people working in the sector often will have better awareness of work that has happened in an area and can give ideas. You can also start by asking people the kinds of barriers they experience around an issue, like transport, then introduce creative exercises that facilitate them to imagine solutions.

Even if people can't come up with new ideas, it is still very helpful to identify the existing actions that have support in your community.

7.3. Mental health support structures

Engaging with environmental issues calls for Disabled people to acknowledge severe existential threats and difficult emotions. Creating the conditions of safety and accessibility with and for people with varied experiences of disability to share and reflect are vital. It is essential, therefore, to ensure that appropriate mental health support structures are in place to support these. These could include:

- The provision of a named contact with mental health training who can offer one-to-one conversations to hold difficult emotions that arise through the work;
- Peer group support, presenting all participants with the contact details of free professional support;
- Quiet spaces for people to retreat to during in-person engagement events;
- Sign-posting to existing support.

It is important to ensure that any signposted mental health professionals are aware of the social model of disability. This is to ensure they do not blame individuals for their mental distress but instead recognise how the places we live in (and the exclusion and hardship that people face there) often create this distress.



7.4. The importance of valuing time and expertise

Engaging in these difficult topics can require extensive emotional labour. It calls on Disabled people to think and talk about the complexity of the, often exhausting, barriers they face as well as the distressing existential threats that climate change poses. It is vital that this labour is fairly compensated through pay and that you cover any expenses that are incurred by the work. This is especially important given that many Disabled people have limited resources, including energy, due to the nature of their impairment or long-term health condition, and there is overwhelming poverty within the community. For example, in the UK nearly half of all people in poverty are Disabled people or living with someone who is. Pay will also improve the quality of engagement by valuing the expertise of the Disabled person and freeing up capacity that will make it easier for them to justify spending valuable personal resources on the conversation. It helps to build long-term relationships with participants so that you can involve them in future relevant projects. As many Disabled people rely on welfare payments, offer participants the options of payment in the form of vouchers or a non-cash gift to ensure they will not risk losing access to essential welfare payments. Ask participants what store they would like vouchers for and in what form (e.g. email, physical card etc).





7.5. Creative engagement approaches

Food, creativity, play and community can all offer ways into conversation that can make the content easier to handle. Specific approaches could include discussions with picnics, creative writing workshops and Forum Theatre (a form of interactive theatre developed in the 1970s to generate solidarity and empower audience members to explore responses to difficult societal issues). Always consider the interests and needs of your target audience when designing what methodology to use. These approaches need to nurture care-full spaces where imagination and positive thinking are possible, while being conscious of the fact that being empowered enough to imagine is often a privilege and can be emotionally complex and difficult for people in situations of extreme disadvantage. It is also important to design your creative activities around the access needs of participants. For example, visual arts will be inaccessible to many visually impaired people, and some neurodivergent people (but definitely not all!) might need careful structuring to engage in creative methodologies or prefer more direct methods of engagement.

Where food is involved, ensure people are given time to indicate dietary needs in advance, and provide take-away boxes for people with digestive conditions who might not be able to eat during a session but would benefit from the nutrition when back home in a comfortable environment. Having take-away boxes for everyone involved is helpful in reducing food waste after an event; framing the purpose of the boxes in this way can minimise any stigma that people may otherwise feel in taking food home, be it for themselves or others.

The Climate and Disability Forum Theatre video and Community Climate Action project Creativity Insights project might be of interest.



7.6. Accessibility

When you begin working with a group of Disabled people, it is important to ask about their access priorities and communication preferences as these can vary widely, even amongst people who share a particular impairment. If you are involving other local DPOs in the work then it can be helpful to ask them about the accessibility features that you should build into your sessions for their communities, but some initial communication considerations to be aware of are noted here.



d/Deaf people: Deaf people are people who identify as part of the community of Deaf people and use sign language. It's important to work with a sign language interpreter during conversations and check what sign language people use (different countries have different sign languages). Within funding applications, it is important to include budget for access needs, such as videos with sign language interpretation when creating digital materials, as well as the provision of accurate captions and/or a written transcript. It's also important to recognise that not everyone with hearing loss will use sign language. Some people may use hearing loops, lip reading or prefer live captioning. Turn-taking with one person speaking at a time is especially important and keeping the pace manageable. Include breaks for the interpreter and captioners. Aim to minimise background noise.



Neurodivergent people: priorities will vary hugely across individuals who are neurodivergent. Offer schedules and clear detail on what is to be discussed in advance of any meetings or events. During discussion and in meetings, it can help to ensure plenty of space between comments to give people time to process what has been said, to minimise distractions in the space, include plenty of breaks, use clear language, share concrete examples where appropriate, and enable access to a quiet space for people to retreat to should a conversation become overwhelming. Avoid distracting backgrounds, such as spaces with lots of noise, reflections, flickering or bright lights.



Non-speaking people and people with a speech impairment: flexibility with all the ways in which people may be able to or prefer to communicate is important, including giving time for people to be able to express themselves. This includes making chat a communication option on video calls. However, you may also wish to indicate that the chat function should only be used for accessibility purposes as side conversations in the chat are often less accessible to those unable to interact with the chat and can be disruptive for people in the meeting who are screen reader users.



Blind and visually impaired people: how people adapt to vision impairment is unique to them and may shift over time. When meeting in person, say your name on introduction and whenever you start speaking in a group conversation. Let someone know when you are leaving the conversation too. When giving presentations, provide slides in advance but do not assume that they will be read; speak in a way that ensures someone could follow all of the important parts of the presentation without any interaction with the slides, including describing significant visuals like photos or graphs. During introductions, consider what visual information (skin colour, apparent disability aids, a funky t-shirt or zoom background etc.) people may miss out on and encourage people to share this. Remember that text on screen during videos is generally not accessible to blind people so an alternative is needed. If someone is a guide dog owner, it can be helpful to have access to a water bowl for the dog and space for them to settle. When sharing written information, ask how this information can best be presented for ease of access; the priorities of a screen reader user may be different to someone who uses magnifiers. It can be helpful to provide documents in sans serif font, with a minimum font size of 14, using double spacing and avoiding blocks of text in capitals. Care is needed when including images; images should be accompanied by alt text and the images should not be positioned in a way that interrupts the flow of written information. It is helpful to share information in Word rather than pdf documents (which ensures someone can modify font size and colour contrasts themselves if appropriate) and to provide these documents a few days in advance of when they are needed. Bullet points and headings can also help with navigation of documents.



Learning difficulties: Follow the guidance given above on Plain English and glossaries to explain jargon, and provide Easy Read alternatives. When you know a discussion is likely to be complex, it can help to pay for someone's personal assistant to attend with them, and for some paid time before the meeting to allow the Disabled person and personal assistant to develop their responses at an appropriate pace.

When trying to ensure that spaces and meetings are accessible, there are some baseline accessibility requirements you will need to meet:



An accessible venue, including step-free access, accessible parking, accessible seating, lighting, a safe space and accessible toilet. Particular care is needed when organising multi-day events where accommodation is included. It is important to book accessible conferencing venues or hotels rather than hostels or campsites, to ensure people can have single occupancy rooms with en-suite bathrooms that meet specific access needs. Depending on people's access needs, it may be important to look into the presence of ceiling hoists in bedrooms or the hire of mobile hoists.



Including breaks every hour that allow plenty of time for people to use the bathroom, perhaps make a drink, stretch or have a moment to decompress without feeling rushed.



Using Plain English.



Enabling hybrid attendance. Some Disabled people are digitally excluded and others will find it hard to travel to an event, so you will need to meet the needs of both. Investing in or borrowing high quality technology is vital for ensuring those with sensory impairments can engage easily. Where possible, it is best to aim for hybrid in a way that enables participation fully by people both in the physical space and the digital space. However, you can offer separate online and in-person sessions where a hybrid option would be impractical, such as when you're outside for nature engagement or do not have access to appropriate digital support or technological resources.



Online sessions will need to have captions enabled. There's also a good chance that some participants will request for it to be recorded if possible in case of an unexpected flare in symptoms or fatigue. If so, it is important to be transparent about how, where and with who the recording will be used and shared.

Make it easy to ask for access needs. Do this at least a few weeks in advance and offer people the option to communicate these online or over the phone. We recommend this approach because people's needs are wide and diverse, and it's vital not to make assumptions. This also helps avoid unnecessary costs. For example, if you don't know who will be attending your event then you must source a sign language interpreter but if your event is ticketed and no sign language users are present, then booking an interpreter will only cost you money and potentially divert them from an event that a sign language user is attending. If you do need an interpreter, you will likely need to book at least one month in advance to be sure of securing one. If budgetary issues are a problem, explore creative ways in which you can meet these access needs. There are often clever and affordable fixes, and Disabled people are experts in finding these. Where access needs of participants clash, an honest conversation with both parties will often help you find an amicable solution. Make sure that people can contact you over the phone if necessary as some Disabled people find digital communication inaccessible.



Mistakes, unfortunately, are made by everyone. When you fail to meet an access need, the situation is almost always recoverable so long as you don't become defensive. Instead, promptly, calmly, and respectfully own up to your failures, apologise and work with the participant to co-create solutions to put in place as swiftly as possible. A small apology gift that is sensitive to someone's interests and priorities can also help in these cases. Whatever you do, remember your aim is to meet the needs of the Disabled person and authentically win back their trust, not to assuage your own guilt.





8. Writing the plan

Though it is important that the steering group has meaningful agency over the plan, as noted above, it is impractical and inaccessible to write by committee. A member of staff will be required to carry out both the writing and editing work in line with the input given to them by the community and steering group.

8.1. Creating the first draft

It helps to start by typing up all the input you have received during the engagement sessions. When the feedback is in one place, clear ideas should start to emerge that you can break down into the themes, then aims and actions. This might take a bit of time and distance, or a fresh pair of eyes from a colleague. If you find that there was a topic that people struggled to offer ideas towards then it could be helpful to do your own research or talk to an expert who works in that area for ideas that the steering group can then give more disability specific insight on. This is particularly the case when lots of people are sharing their lived experience of a barrier but a clear solution hasn't been identified. Experts can also give very useful advice about what actions are feasible and practical, even if they cannot reflect on this from the perspective of someone with lived experience of disability.





You will want to take your own approach on how exactly you pitch your plan, but with the Bristol plan we decided to include the actions that, though infeasible in the current system, were fundamental for making climate action accessible. We thought of this as 'planting our flag in the ground'. However, if an action was impossible to make happen for political or technical reasons then we left it out and tried to represent the concern it emerged from in a different way.

Often you'll have to make decisions around how much detail to add. People may come up with very specific details, for example how exactly an accessible recycle bin should work. Although useful, this level of detail will make a plan unusably long. In this case, it is best to keep the point to an overarching one. You could also recommend that the design of a particular project or infrastructure is co-designed with Disabled people. For length reasons, you will likely also need to leave out the detail around history or context of why a certain action is needed.

We also recommend leaving out actions that are general climate actions and not disability-specific. For example, a participant might be very keen that people eat less meat but unless they can articulate why this is important to Disabled people in particular, then it is likely best left out of the plan. There is plenty of already existing climate resources that outline these kinds of actions. Also do be mindful of actions that could have ableist consequences. For example, some people will be very keen that people should stop using plastic, but this would be extremely difficult for Disabled people given that many people do not have the choice not to use plastic given its use in items such as medical equipment. In the nuance of your write up, you can reflect the need and keenness of the community to move towards more sustainable options, while acknowledging the limits on what it is possible for all Disabled people to achieve. Ultimately, we recommend that you don't spend too much time or energy perfecting the draft version of the plan, as the detail will be worked out together with the steering group.



8.2. Working with feedback

We recommend that you read the [steering_group_section](#) for detail of how you work with them on editing the plan. In essence, however, the steering group will give you a series of edits to make to the draft. You should make these after steering group meetings and then email them to the group. Not many members will comment at this stage, but it is important to share the edits you have made for transparency purposes.

Similarly, when you share the plan at public feedback events, this will leave you with a list of edits to make. If your plan is too long to be shared in detail during an event, then we recommend sharing the plan with people in advance for those who wish to read the detail and focus on simply summarising the plan during the event.

Once you have a version that includes edits made in response to feedback from the public, you can take the plan to the steering group for sign off. They may still wish to add edits at this stage so do be transparent at the beginning of the meeting that the focus is solely on the new edits made and that the work has to be finished within that meeting. Encourage people to work to a philosophy of 'good enough'.





8.3. Translations

As discussed above, when you have a final version of the plan you will need to translate it into several versions (ensure to allocate project budget for this). We recommend the formats below, while also making it clear that people can request other versions.



A screen reader friendly Plain English document in Word and PDF formats: Having the plan available in Word format will allow for users to format the document to meet their access needs. Have some hard copy versions of the plan that you can give/post to people who are digitally excluded.



Easy Read: These can be ordered from a service like A2i. If you are likely to create more Easy Read documents in future, you could potentially save money by learning to write Easy Read documents yourself through a course such as Photosymbols. Make sure, however, to pay a learning disabled person to go through your translation with you to make any changes needed. Also bear in mind that unless you can source and edit your own photos you have to pay Photosymbols subscription to use their library.



BSL Video: It can help to get recommendations of signers from your local Deaf community to ensure that the translation is good quality.



Audio CD: In our experience, not many people request a copy of the CD, however the translation is cheap, so it is worth having some CD copies ready for when people want them. Host the audio file online somewhere for people to download.



Technical version: We recommend that you write the main version of the plan in Plain English to acknowledge that it belongs to the community of Disabled people. But at the end of the process you may wish to create a technical version that uses the discourse and jargon used by the environmental sector. This can make it quicker to read for the stakeholders you want to influence and to capture the nuance that could be missed in the Plain English version.



Accessible community summary: Often plans will end up quite long. Though you should include a summary in the main plan, it's important to have a short community summary of the most important points so that length doesn't put people off reading it or make it inaccessible to some.

Bear in mind that translations can take up to two months to deliver after being ordered. It is best practice to launch all versions of the plan at once to ensure equal access so factor this into your timeline.





9. Sharing the plan

Creating the plan is only the first step. For the plan to have a meaningful impact you will need to actively advocate for it.

9.1. Launch

A key space to advocate for your plan is at its launch. We recommend bringing together Disabled people and decision-makers for the audience of the launch, with a dual purpose of celebrating the community's work and advocating for the plan. This saves the time and cost of a separate event for each audience, and can encourage decision-makers to mingle with Disabled people, which will allow them to engage and empathise with the needs of the community more easily.

However, you should be aware that many decision-makers are unlikely to make the time to attend an event about Disabled people without strong encouragement. We recommend that you link your launch with an event that decision-makers would already attend. Getting the community of Disabled people there will then require ensuring accessibility features are in place, including transport, clear advertising, an accessible venue, and having a clear offer, such as food.

Have a few copies of the plan for people to take back to their colleagues and members of their community to advocate for it. It is also useful to use the event to identify individuals who can help open doors for you to take the plan into new spaces.

9.2. Advocating for the plan

Once you have a final version of the plan, we recommend creating a list of people to share it, along with an action plan for how you will engage them. You may wish to consider the following stakeholders:



Local politicians: Approach your local political parties to ask if you can give a briefing on the plan. If they don't respond at first it can help to find a Disabled person who has been involved in the plan and/or an active member of the party to open doors for you. If one of the main parties is very supportive you might also wish to explore if there are any actions from the plan that they wish to bring to full council as motions.



Local environmental organisations: Many of the actions in the plan will likely be the responsibility not only of the local council but local environmental charities and organisations. You may wish to send a copy of the plan to and ask for a meeting with the most influential organisations. They are also important stakeholders to invite to the launch. It can be worth asking which gatherings and events these organisations frequent to see if you can have a slot to present your plan.



Specific organisations mentioned in the plan: Some organisations may emerge as being responsible for specific important asks in your plan. For example, the local bus provider is likely to be vital for asks on transport. It can be worth reaching out to these organisations to make them aware of the specific asks that are relevant to them.



Local disability organisations: These organisations can help spread the word about the plan, both with their members and in the meetings that they attend.



LATEST
NEWS

Local media: Though media organisations cannot action the plan for you, sensitive media coverage can support communications campaigns to help raise awareness, respectability and influence.



General public: Some actions in your plan are likely to be asks for the general public to act in more accessible ways. For example, you may be asking for people not to block pavements with recycle bins. In these cases, a communication campaign could be useful and you may wish to seek funding to do this work.





10. Step by step

Every community requires a different approach and so we do not wish to dictate how you carry out your project. However, it is helpful to have an overview of what a project could look like and a possible roadmap that you can adapt to your needs. We have therefore provided a summary of key steps for creating a community climate action plan by and for Disabled people:



Project idea: Whoever starts with the initial idea to create a plan will need to secure support from their organisation. You may wish to use the listed advantages of creating a plan from the 'Who should create a plan and why' section to help make your case.



Bring together collaborators: Whatever type of organisation you are, you will likely need other organisations to feed in. This could be a DPO bringing onboard an environmental charity to offer environmental knowledge for the project or the other way around. Having your local council as a partner will also be helpful in enhancing the potential impact of the project.



Apply for funding: Funding bids might not be immediately successful. If your first attempts fail, you might wish to look at ways to rework the project and apply to a different funder.



Recruit staff: Having the right staff leading on the project is essential to its success. Recruiting Disabled people can take extra time to find the right fit, so allow for an appropriate window for this process.



Create a plan of action: Once you have the people and organisations in place then you can start mapping out the plan of action. You can start this process before recruiting a member of staff but giving them input and agency over this plan will support its success.



Raise awareness: During this period it can also be helpful to be building general awareness about the project and the importance of including Disabled people in climate action. This will open doors for you later. You will often find that when you start the work, awareness of local stakeholders and members of the public will be very low. It can help to meet important stakeholders to make them aware of the upcoming work and to write opinion pieces or go on local radio.



Recruit steering group and first meeting: It is important that the steering group can feed in on the plan of action. So, before you start engagement, recruit your steering group and have a first meeting to get their feedback. They will often have very useful insights into how to carry out the engagement work in a successful way. Bear in mind that the recruitment process will also take time and that many Disabled people need at least a couple of weeks' notice to get a meeting in their diary. Come to this first meeting with a draft code of conduct and terms of reference ready for them to refine and agree on.



Engagement period: This period can be long or short depending on if you are working from scratch or using the Bristol community climate action plan as inspiration. If you are starting from scratch it will help to have some kind of engagement activity that touches on each of the themes you intend to use for the plan. If you are working with the Bristol plan, then you can be more targeted in how you are giving the general public opportunities to feed in.



Create a draft plan: The best way to invite input from the steering group is to bring a draft plan to them that they can get their teeth into. This work will need to be carried out by a member of staff and to blend in the feedback gathered through the engagement process.



Review plan with the steering group: The steering group can now be invited to rigorously discuss the draft plan. This work can take a lot of preparation so space out these meetings to give the members a chance to fully engage. A member of staff will need to listen to and process the input and edit the plan accordingly.



Public feedback on plan: The plan developed by the steering group must now be taken back to the community to build a sense of community ownership and to ensure that nothing has been overlooked. Following these events, more edits will be made to the plan.



Finalise plan with steering group: A final meeting with the steering group should be held to finalise the plan.



Proof and design plan: The plan should now be proofed and designed to ensure professionalism.



Plan translations: The plan should now be translated in Easy Read, BSL, audio, and a screen reader friendly document and technical document.



Launch: The plan can now be launched. It is important that the community can come and celebrate the work they have invested in the plan but also that the event supports the plan to reach the people it needs to influence.



Advocate for the plan: Well done! The plan is now finished and launched, but for it to create meaningful change will require active and sustained advocacy and communications, pushing it into the spaces where it can influence change. Be sure to factor in enough time to the project to allow for staff time to do this important advocacy work.



? **And then?:** Many potential project ideas are likely to emerge from the plan. We hope that creating it is just the beginning of the work of your organisation on disability and climate and many future successful funding bids.

Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership has resources and guidance on their community climate action model that can be used by any community. You might want to refer to the [project model](#) and project [insight reports](#).





11. Challenges and solutions

When looking to reach out to and engage with Disabled people and the disability movement in climate conversations and climate action, there are a number of challenges and solutions to consider.

11.1. Consultation fatigue

Challenge: One of the common responses from Disabled people during the co-creation of the Bristol community climate action plan by and for Disabled people was 'you're a dreamer'. Disabled people are often asked to respond to consultations that never or rarely lead to the changes they need. This can leave people feeling that engaging is a waste of time and energy and that nothing will ever change, meaning that imagining change is too hard or painful. Overcoming these, very understandable barriers, to engage the community in envisaging better futures and climate action can be challenging.

Solution: Consultation fatigue is not a problem that can be fixed easily as it builds up over many experiences and interactions. Multiple interactions with you can help build trust in your drive to ensure change is enacted and that you won't disappear after the consultation box is ticked. This trust can be magnified by any examples you can give to demonstrate that people engaging with the project has led to real change - however small. In some cases, you might find that making a generous creative offer can help expand people's capacity for responding to the problems, given that space for creativity and imagining positive futures can be a privilege that isn't afforded to many Disabled people. However, solely offering the creative experience is unlikely to be enough to interest people without other forms of compensation, such as vouchers, a meal or another gift of interest to those taking part.



11.2. Distrust

Challenge: Eco-ableism within the environmental movement has created distrust among many Disabled people. Even among those Disabled people who are willing to engage in environmental issues, you are likely to experience caution or hesitation while you work to demonstrate that you authentically care about disability rights as well the climate and environmental agenda.

Solution: Trust will grow over time as you forge relationships with individuals and can demonstrate an understanding of, and ability to respectfully hold, their lived experiences. Where this trust is most meaningfully gained (or lost) is how you engage with the environmental movement on behalf of Disabled people. For example, some of the Disabled people involved in the development of the disability-led community climate action plan in Bristol were critical of the barriers within the design and implementation of the new Clean Air Zone. They organised a protest with Bristol Disability Equality Forum (BDEF), the DPO leading the co-production of the community climate action plan at the time. They advocated for the need for clean air in the city, as both an environmental and health issue, while also demanding that this action be created in a socially just way. This protest secured wide local media coverage that resulted in efforts to address some of the concerns raised. Alongside this outcome, it resulted in an increase in volunteer applications from Disabled people for BDEF as well as a general uptick in trust amongst the disability community in Bristol directed towards those developing the plan.

Always remember that you can retain nuance and adopt middle grounds that respect the need for climate and environmental action while passionately advocating for this action to be just. Though taking this path may lead some in the community to act towards you in a frustrated or aggressive manner, in the long-term you may find that will have won you the trust and respect of the quiet majority. That said, it is important to understand that you can't win everyone over and it is important to draw your boundaries if feeling threatened, unsafe or overwhelmed.



11.3. Lack of research and data

Challenge: The exclusion of Disabled people from the environmental and climate movements and the deep-seated ableism of our society means that there are currently huge gaps in the research that should address the impact of various environmental issues on Disabled people. This issue can make engaging Disabled people difficult because important information is missing, as are solutions to many potential problems. There is also a marked absence of projects that serve Disabled people on environmental issues, and climate issues in particular. This can make it very difficult to use existing examples to inspire or encourage Disabled people, as you might with other audiences.

Solution: We are collecting resources that exist on the Sensing Climate website www.sensing-climate.com, including resource lists put together by others, such as Disability Debrief and the Disability Inclusive Climate Action Research Programme (see also the final section of this guide). Where data doesn't exist and you don't have the money to commission new research, a cheaper and more practical solution can be to run a sharing session. While the exact format and structure will vary depending on local context and those involved, these sessions are about bringing together – as equal partners – Disabled people to share their knowledge about their lived experiences on an issue with subject experts, who can share detail in your area of interest. Together, these two groups can identify possible barriers and solutions. Ensure that you offer Disabled people compensation for taking part and remember the access considerations noted above.



11.4. Lack of understanding about climate in the disability sector

Challenge: The exclusion of Disabled people from environmental and climate issues and lack of accessible education resources means that understanding about climate issues in the sector and community of Disabled people is much lower than it could be. This can create challenges for starting conversations given that a base level of knowledge can't always be assumed.

Solution: Education is important here and will have a wider positive impact than your project alone. Simplicity is key, focusing on 'need to know' knowledge rather than trying to communicate the full complexity, unless the nuance would be accessible to and of interest to the specific audience of Disabled people that you're engaging. When doing this work, be respectful of the knowledge that Disabled people bring, which might be in a topic area that is unknown to you. Always demonstrate the importance of the issue by connecting it directly to an issue that the community of Disabled people cares about. For example, in a UK context, transport, and the opportunities and potential barriers associated with it, is almost always a strong connection to climate for Disabled people. Other useful areas can include, accessible housing, energy poverty, access to jobs and emergency preparedness.

11.5. Competition for attention with other difficult issues

Challenge: To be Disabled is to experience barriers to your everyday existence, which can be severe and distressing. As such, the focus of many Disabled people – and DPOs – has to be on the immediacy of Disabled people not being able to heat their home, find employment or access institutions they need to.

Solution: It is important to understand in these contexts that it is unreasonable to ask for the engagement of Disabled people who experience severe difficulties. If you can offer payment for engagement (including the costs of personal assistants where necessary), it may change the picture and help Disabled



people to be able to devote resources to your work, as well as providing them with essential resources. It is also helpful in these cases to draw on the 'the best opportunity to make an accessible society in our lifetime' narrative above. Such efforts could help Disabled people who struggle for resource to understand the links between their priority problems and climate change, and the potential overlap in solutions. For example, a Disabled person who is struggling to access work or social interaction due to the inaccessibility of their local bus service could be engaged by explaining that changes to buses as a part of climate action could provide a window to ensure accessibility injustices are also addressed.

It can be valuable when engagement around environmental issues also offers an opportunity to connect with a range of Disabled people, to network and to socialise. Thinking in this way can help to enhance the connection that participants have to your work and organisation, increasing their willingness to engage in further projects.

11.6. Burnout

Challenge: Working in this area has many rewards, including the satisfaction and purpose that arises from supporting a vital but often overlooked issue, and meeting some lovely, passionate, and brilliant people. Yet it also creates considerable stress and challenges for mental health. Stories from Disabled people engaged in climate and environmental activism can be bleak and difficult; and it is wise to anticipate varying levels of apathy, despair, dismissal, condescension and even aggression from some Disabled people. You may find that some of the Disabled people who you might expect to be your closest allies and supporters become antagonists, even if you are Disabled yourself. This can be more damaging on your mental health than more severe resistance from antagonists outside the community. Unless careful steps are taken, the work can feel isolating.



Solutions: The metaphor about putting on your oxygen mask first applies to work on environmental crises as much as it does aeroplane emergencies. It helps to hold in mind the pressures that many Disabled people are under and that aggressive interactions are nearly always the reflexes of people with too few emotional and practical resources to be able to handle impossible situations in a more caring fashion. However, you must not sacrifice your own wellbeing and health in the name of this empathy. Remember that this is the work of our lifetimes and that you cannot help the cause if you are forced to leave it due to ill health or burnout. During good times, invest in building rigorous mental health safety nets and procedures for yourself and your team if you have one. A strong and understanding support network around the project is vital, as is creating spaces for joy within the work and outside of it. The gravity of the issue calls for a practice of joy because of its severity, urgency and gravity, not in spite of it. Joy, play, self-care and allies are invaluable tools for processing anger and sadness that could otherwise consume you. Looking after yourself is an act of resistance. However, before starting engagement, ensure that your organisation (if you are working within an organisation) has robust safeguarding policies and procedures in place that you can follow in cases where you or people you have engaged with are at risk, and that facilitators and engagement teams know when to cease engagement if threatened, unsafe or overwhelmed.



12. Take home messages



Nothing (about us) without us: Disabled people need to be engaged in climate and environmental work from the very beginning if projects are to be accessible. The community of Disabled people is very diverse and has wide-ranging lived experience so be sure to engage experts and/or a wide cross-section of the community. Do not rely on one or two personal contacts who happen to be Disabled people, unless disability work is their specialism, as they will otherwise be unlikely to have the insights you need to be responsive to the wider community.



Fair remuneration: Disabled people face many competing and difficult pressures, and often high levels of poverty. To enable their participation and value the expertise they are bringing to your project, be sure to fairly compensate them. Monetary compensation is normally best, though this should be via gift vouchers where people prefer this, with the option to choose vouchers that are relevant to them.



Connect the issue to what Disabled people already care about: Disabled people have many demands on their attention, so it is important to connect climate and environmental issues to what the community already cares about. For example, you can connect the discussion to issues like public transport. A meeting on accessible and sustainable transport will, in most cases, garner more attention and attendance from Disabled people than one that is framed directly as a discussion about climate change.



Ensure accessibility: If you want your work to be successful and for Disabled people to engage positively with it, then you must ensure that access needs are met. This means ensuring standard accessibility requirements are met and then making it easy for people to communicate any additional access needs to you. For example, by including an open-text box where people can input their access needs when signing up to an event instead of having to take on the extra burden of reaching out to you to arrange this.



Take inspiration from already existing plans: We know this work is hard to do from scratch and you don't have to. We'd be delighted if you use the Bristol plan as inspiration and adapt it for your local context, providing our work is credited.





13. Links to further information

There is a growing number of excellent resources around disability and the climate crisis. We have provided links to some of these here and will update these via the Resources page of the Sensing Climate website.

The Community Climate Action Programme in Bristol enabled the co-production of the world's first community climate action plan by and for Disabled people. The project is coordinated by Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership and funded by the National Lottery. You can access the plan online: <https://bristolclimatenature.org/projects/community-climate-action/#community-climate-action-plans>
The Partnership also has a range of resources from the broader Community Climate Action Project, including the Climate and Disability strand of work, that could be helpful: <https://bristolclimatenature.org/projects/community-climate-action/#resources>

- Climate and creativity insights report: <https://bristolclimatenature.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Climate-and-Creativity-Insights-Report-Final.pdf>
- Capacity building insights report: <https://bit.ly/400HXyt>
- Community climate and nature action model: <https://bit.ly/4jBEtth>

The Disability and Climate Change Public Archive project documents the wisdom that Disabled people bring to navigating the climate crisis, foregrounding conversations with activists, advocates, artists, first responders, policymakers, and other communal leaders. It is curated by Professor Julia Watts Belser in collaboration with a brilliant group of student research assistants, design and accessibility consultants. <http://disabilityclimatechange.georgetown.domains/>



The Disability Inclusive Climate Action Research Programme (DICARP) is a collaborative effort to generate, co-produce, share, and translate knowledge on how efforts to combat the climate crisis can be designed and implemented in ways that respect, protect, and fulfil the rights of Disabled people. Founded by Professor Sébastien Jodoin at McGill University, DICARP is a collaborative initiative led by the Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism and the Canada Research Chair in Human Rights, Health, and the Environment. <https://www.disabilityinclusiveclimate.org/>

The Disability Inclusive Emergency Management (DIEM) toolkit has been produced by Collaborating 4 Inclusion in Australia, to share key principles and practical guidance for the design and implementation of disability inclusive emergency management. It also includes self-assessment and action planning templates and a map of good practice resources. <https://collaborating4inclusion.org/didrr-australia/disability-inclusive-emergency-management-diem-toolkit/>

Disability Debrief is a guide for the Disability community and 'disability curious', examining world news through a disability lens. Disability Debrief's climate work is led by Áine Kelly-Costello, a Disabled storyteller and campaigner based in Aotearoa New Zealand. Áine reports on and has curated a comprehensive guide to the growing resources on disability and the climate crisis, showcasing global voices and wisdom from the disability community. <https://www.disabilitydebrief.org/climate/>

The Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction Network (DiDRRN) brings together Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) with 'mainstream' and disability-focused development and relief organisations to secure the active participation and meaningful contribution of Disabled people in Disaster Risk Reduction policy and practice. <https://www.didrrn.net/>



CBM Global partners with global and regional organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) to enable important work at the intersection of disability and the climate crisis. You can find a range of helpful resources on their website, including key events, briefing papers and reports sharing experiences of Disabled people across the Global South. <https://cbm-global.org/news/climate-crisis-and-persons-with-disabilities>

The International Disability Alliance has produced a range of resources on climate change and disability rights, from an action call and guide to promoting disability-inclusive climate change to various events and reflections: <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/climate-change>

The European Disability Forum is also conducting important work on disability and climate action, recognising that Disabled people are often disproportionately impacted by climate change yet rarely considered in climate action. <https://www.edf-feph.org/disability-and-climate-action/>

Sustained Ability is a Disability Led network working with grassroots movements and organisations on Disability and climate justice. They convene the Disability and Climate Network, and have been providing Disabled leadership in the global climate movement, and within the UNFCCC since COP23. <https://www.sustainedability.org/>

Sustain Our Abilities is a climate change non-profit organisation focused on the intersection of climate, health and disability. Founded by Dr Marcalee Alexander and Dr Craig Alexander, they aim to transform climate adaptation and mitigation to enhance the autonomy, health and wellbeing of Disabled people. <https://www.sustainourabilities.org/>



Protest for All is a guide, written by disabled climate activists, that offers ideas for anyone protesting on climate change to make what they do more accessible; maximising opportunities to bring the skills of the disabled people's movement to the climate movement. You can access the guide as a pdf, Word or Easy Read document online: <https://sensing-climate.com/resources>

Crippling Climate Adaptation: Disability Justice and Climate Change is a short film co-directed by Karina Cardona, who works at the nexus of disability, environmental justice and climate justice. You can access the film online (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUDsjgmQWu4>) as well as an interview with Karina conducted as part of Enabling Commons podcast available via DICARP: <https://www.disabilityinclusiveclimate.org/enabling-commons/karina-cardona>

Sins Invalid is a disability justice based performance project, led by Disabled people of colour, that celebrates Disabled artists of colour and LGBTQ/gender-variant artists as communities that have been historically marginalised. In 2020, they produced a three-part podcast series that reflects on the connections between climate justice and disability justice: <https://sinsinprocess.squarespace.com/podcast/2020/10/16/episode-1-foundations-of-climate-justice-and-disability-justice>

Get in touch contact@bristolclimatenature.org

