

Working accessibly with consultants: An EENET guide

EENET's clients are strongly committed to inclusion and human rights. EENET is also committed to a diverse team of consultants and volunteers – women and men, with and without disabilities, from diverse countries and language groups. We aim to do everything we can to accommodate their needs. **This guide contains some ideas to help you, as a client, apply reasonable accommodation principles when working with consultants.** Many of these ideas also apply to full-time staff and volunteers.

1. Ask consultants about access or support needs

Provide as much information as possible about the assignment in advance, so that the consultant can tell you about all relevant access needs. Do this before signing the contract.

Finding out about access needs will help you and the consultant to plan the assignment logistics more effectively. For instance, you will find out:

- whether local travel, food, hotel or meeting venue arrangements need to be adjusted;
- whether somebody will be required to help the consultant carry materials;
- whether a language or sign language interpreter is needed;
- whether project documents need to be available in accessible formats, such as large print or accessible Word/PDF files.

2. Consider travel arrangements

2.1 Taxi travel to airports

Many consultants will not be able to take public transport to airports, and will need clients to cover the cost of taxis. This may be because:

- Some consultants have mobility problems which can make it difficult to travel on buses and trains or to move their heavy luggage on public transport.
- Many consultants (particularly from EENET) bring useful free materials with them: these are usually heavy. By allowing taxi travel, you will be making it easier for your in-country staff and partners to receive valuable inclusive education resources at a much lower cost than if these were sent by post or courier.
- Some consultants live far from airports, and/or in rural areas with poor public transport links. This means long-distance taxi journeys will be the only realistic option, especially when flights are early or late in the day.



2.2. Travel budgets

Restrictive rules about travel to airports may make it physically or financially impossible for a consultant to accept a piece of work, or to work for that client in future. An effective solution is to set one (realistic) budget limit for airfare and airport transfers combined. A more expensive airport transfer can sometimes be offset by a slightly cheaper airfare.

Don't forget that consultants will need to eat and drink during lengthy international flights, which often involve waiting long periods in airports. Expenses or per diem periods should cover this travel time.

2.3 Seats on planes

EENET's consultants always try to obtain the cheapest prices for their travel. For some consultants with mobility impairments, a long-haul flight can cause considerable discomfort. Being able to select an economy seat in the best position or with optimal leg room is important. Some airlines make a small additional charge for choosing a specific seat: budgets should be flexible enough to allow this. Clients may have rules against paying for such 'extras', but these rules should be waived when small additional costs cover a need rather than a preference.

Sometimes clients book flights for consultants. When this happens, it is important that you check if the consultant has any access needs or specific seat requests, as well as checking other requirements such as dietary needs.

2.4. Travel timings

When looking for the cheapest flights, we often find options that involve long waiting times between connecting flights, multiple transfers, or departure/arrival at very unsociable hours. Sometimes it is a false economy to pick the cheapest yet most inconvenient route and time for a flight. Such journeys can mean the consultant gets exhausted and cannot work effectively at the start of their assignment. We advise looking for a balance between the price of the travel and the impact the journey will have on a consultant's health and capacity to work.

It is also important to give consultants adequate warning of the travel requirements (dates and durations), so they have plenty of time to find and book flights. They also need time to make necessary health and medication arrangements, or other travel support arrangements, such as booking mobility assistance at the airports.

3. Provide information about physical activity

Some consultancies are static (e.g. desk research) but others can be physically demanding. If you know that an assignment will require significant amounts of walking, or walking on rough terrain, such as between project sites, tell consultants at the start. This should ideally be in the Terms of Reference as well as forming part of contract negotiations. Likewise, tell the consultant in advance if you know the

assignment will require long hours of travel on rough roads.

This information will help the consultant to let you know in good time whether accommodations are needed to help them manage mobility problems, pain or exhaustion, or even whether they feel unable to accept the assignment but can suggest an alternative colleague. In most cases, getting good information about the physical demands of a job will simply help consultants plan their activities so that there is enough time for rest and recovery.

4. Include rest and recovery in schedules

Rest and recovery from travel, and from tiring training or data collection missions, is often needed for everyone. For some people, significant damage will be caused to their health if they don't get recovery time. In the field, this can mean, for instance, ensuring that consultants are not expected to work or travel on both weekend days. Build a few days' recovery into the assignment schedule so that reports are not due as soon as the consultant gets home. This also ensures that you get the best possible report.

5. Support different information formats

Ensure that your application process is accessible. For instance, make sure that ToR documents are in Word or accessible PDF format. If you use application forms or online application systems, make sure these can be accessed by consultants using computer accessibility software such as screen readers.

If you are sending background documents to a consultant, find out whether they can be accessed by screen reader software; and whether the contrast, font size and other features can easily be changed.

This tool will tell you how accessible your PDFs are:

www.access-for-all.ch/en/pdf-lab/pdf-accessibility-checker-pac.html

This applies to the way your email software is set up too – look into how easy it is for someone with visual impairments to access emails from your system.

This website offers advice on making email more accessible:

www.accessible-email.org/

6. Consider mental health

In October 2017, a report commissioned by the UK Government was published. [Thriving at work. The Stevenson / Farmer review of mental health and employers](#) contains important recommendations and core standards for UK employers to support the mental health of their workers. Despite being a very small organisation formed of consultants and volunteers rather than salaried staff, EENET is

committed to upholding these standards to the best of our capacity. We encourage consultancy clients to follow similar standards when employing our consultants, especially since consultancy assignments are often high pressure and exhausting, and/or involve living and working in challenging or dangerous situations.

We therefore encourage clients to:

- Develop an organisational mental health plan which covers consultants as well as staff, or if one already exists, share this with the consultant and relevant staff;
- Ensure staff are aware of mental health issues and seek to end negative stereotypes around mental health;
- Promote open conversations about mental health needs and concerns;
- Ensure working conditions are as good as possible, and consider the potential mental health implications when conditions are challenging;
- Monitor consultants' wellbeing and have clear procedures for how to raise concerns with a consultant and, if appropriate, with managers in EENET.

7. Assume good intent

Clients are right to want good value for money from consultants. Consultants also want to do a good and cost-effective job. Managing different clients' requirements for time, travel and budget can be stressful for consultants, particularly if they need to ask for adaptations. If a client is friendly and flexible when negotiating with consultants and arranging adaptations, this will help a great deal.

8. Final thoughts

The best consultant for the job may have mobility impairments, visual or hearing impairments, chronic health problems, food allergies, or other challenges. Most people experience some kind of physical or mental impairment at some point in their lives.

Being flexible and asking about the consultant's needs in advance will ensure that you get the best out of everyone who works for you. Plus, it will be an easy way to show that your organisation is acting on principles of inclusion and human rights.

If your organisation has rules which do not support these principles of reasonable accommodation and accessibility, it would be worth asking management to update rules and policies. Inclusivity in people management will improve the effectiveness of the organisation, whether for consultants, staff or volunteers.

If you have any questions about the best ways to find, recruit and manage a consultant, please do not hesitate to contact EENET – we are happy to provide advice.

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