

The Spokesperson Network Accessibility Pack



National Spokesperson Training Accessibility Pack

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1. Introduction

Anti-oppression is at the heart of our work on the Spokesperson Network (SPN). In practice, this means trying to reduce the replication of systems of oppression in all stages of our work - from the application process to the media bookings. We embed the social model of disability throughout our work and acknowledge that deaf and disabled people face many access barriers to full participation. We aim to remove these access barriers and make this training and post-training network as accessible as possible. In reality, we are always learning, making mistakes and aiming to improve.

We are keen to support disabled people within our programmes. We include deaf and neurodivergent people, people who have mental health conditions, chronic or fluctuating conditions, as well as everyone else who identifies as disabled or faces ableist barriers.

This Accessibility Pack is relevant to all participants, but especially disabled participants. In it, we share more information about the programme, how it operates, what the training entails, and the potential adjustments we can make to these processes to support disabled participants. It sits alongside the [Spokesperson Handbook](#), which goes into more detail about how the project runs day to day.

Elements of the training, participation in the Spokesperson Network and the media interviews you undertake following the training will contain access barriers that cannot be fully removed. We will be as transparent as possible about these barriers and try to find ways of making the process as accessible as possible.

We want to thank Jamie Hale for all they have done to make the SPN more accessible, including attending the spokesperson training, producing an accessibility report on the training and consulting on this accessibility pack.

Lastly, we recognise that making the program accessible and striving for disability justice is ongoing work that never stops and can always be improved. If anything is missing or could be made better, please let us know.

Access contacts

Molly and Enez are NEON's key access contacts throughout the application process and the duration of the National Spokesperson training programme. Please contact them at any point during the process about any questions or concerns. Contact details:

- Molly (Senior Press Officer): molly@neweconomyorganisers.org or call Molly on 07999 403514.
- Enez (Programme & Operations Assistant): enez@neweconomyorganisers.org

2. Application and interview:

NEON is aware that unconscious bias exists in recruiting, and we see it as our responsibility to both name and take steps to address this. Application processes can often be daunting and time-consuming, and we have tried to create one that is as simple and accessible as possible. We are happy to make adjustments to the application and interview processes to support disabled participants.

When we recruit applicants, we seek to balance various factors, including the issues people are working on, the nature of their expertise, whether we already have spokespeople who work on those issues, and where peoples' identities sit in the spectrum of having been traditionally under-represented or over-represented in broadcast media.

Applications

The applications for the National Spokesperson Training open approximately twice a year. Information about the application and programme resides on [this page](#) of the NEON website and is advertised on our social media accounts ([Twitter](#) & [LinkedIn](#)) and through various [mailing lists](#).

The first stage of our application process is to complete the Google Form, which asks you to briefly detail the issues you're working on and the wider work you're carrying out. After this, we shortlist 20 applicants for an interview and offer places on the training to 10 of those applicants.

Application accessibility

We can make the following adjustments at the application and interview stage, and others as required and by discussion:

- Applications can be made in a variety of formats including
 - Our standard Google Form
 - Audio or voice note
 - Video in spoken English
 - Word or PDF version of our standard application form
- We offer a guaranteed interview to disabled candidates who meet the minimum criteria for participation in the network (outlined below)
- Interview support, including
 - Auto-captions
 - Additional time at interview
 - BSL interpreters or Speech to Text Reporters (we can arrange and fund these but will require notice)

We can also offer support and guidance from the NEON team throughout the process and are happy to discuss other adjustments as required. Please do not be concerned about spelling or grammar - we do not consider these when selecting applications, as they are irrelevant to how effective someone will be as a media spokesperson.

If you need any of these adjustments or others, please indicate them in the Google Application Form or contact Enez or Molly directly via email or phone.

Assessing applications

We will assess applications based on the following criteria:

1. How often does the issue(s) you speak about come up in the media?
We work by pitching out to producers on different issues, so we are looking for spokespeople who can speak about relevant news stories regularly.
2. How likely are producers to book this person?
Whether it is your role, organisation or lived experience, we are looking for people who are experts so producers will want to book them. This does not mean we don't take individuals or people from grassroots groups - far from it! - but how likely someone is to get booked after the training is a key factor in who gets accepted on to the training.
3. Have we got other people in the network who already cover this issue? Do we need more?
We might have a gap on a topic where we need a spokesperson or have an issue that comes up so regularly we always need more people to speak on it.

We offer a guaranteed interview for disabled people who meet the minimum criteria. These criteria are:

1. You actively working on a specific issue;
2. You have relevant expertise on that issue (whether through your role, organisation or lived experience);
3. You have adequate availability to take on media work on that issue;
4. We currently face significant media demand for spokespeople on that issue;
5. We do not have enough spokespeople working on that issue to meet the media demand.

If you want us to consider your application against these criteria, please inform us when you apply.

Because of the high volume of applicants, we cannot offer individual feedback to applicants we have not interviewed. However, when we cannot offer someone a place in the training, it may be because:

- It's a theme or issue already quite heavily represented in the network.
- We have to prioritise issues that are on the agenda of broadcast media for us to secure bookings, and it may be an issue that is not currently receiving enough media attention for us to justify the time and effort investment at present
- We prioritise applicants with identities that have been traditionally under-represented in broadcast media
- It might be better for your organisation to apply to do NEON's three-hour spokesperson skills training for up to five people rather than the full two-day training.

Interviews

Once applications close, we will shortlist 20 applicants for interview and offer places on the course to 10 of those applicants.

The interview is an informal 15-minute discussion with two interviewers, typically held on Zoom. During it, you will be asked the following questions and will have the chance to ask us questions.

1. Tell us a bit about what you do and why you do it.
2. What is your work trying to achieve?
3. How would being part of the Spokesperson Network help with this?
4. Can you identify a major news story in the last couple of months that was relevant to your work that you could've been pitched on?
5. Sometimes, this kind of training can be very difficult for people with certain types of lived experience - the experience of doing interviews of related subjects can put people in a position where they could reactivate trauma from the past. Have you considered that this might be a possibility from doing this kind of training?

We will also ask you about your availability for the training and your ability to do media appearances after completing the training.

You will be contacted in the following week (via email or phone call if preferred) about the outcome of your interview. We are happy to provide feedback to anyone we have interviewed who requests it.

Interview accessibility

We hold these interviews on Zoom as it is the primary technology used for broadcast media interviews, so we encourage people to become familiar with it at the interview stage. However, if it is not accessible for you, please contact Molly and Enez when you receive the interview offer, and we are happy to discuss alternatives.

Zoom is compatible with a range of screenreaders and provides automatically generated captions. It is also integrated with Speech to Text Reporters (STTRs) and BSL interpreters, and we will fund and arrange these (and other necessary access or communication support) for interviewees if required.

We are aware that different people will have different levels of experience being interviewed and that communication barriers may arise. If you anticipate any potential communication barriers, please contact Molly or Enez to discuss these. We understand that people require different amounts of time to interpret questions, and to process, structure, and produce their answers. We can provide additional interview time as required.

3. The training

The training is quite intense and contains a lot of material. It is divided into two online days and one offline day. [You can find a draft of our timetable here](#). There is no need for you to take this in, but it gives you an outline of the structure of our training, which may be useful.

The online days take place on Zoom from 09:00-13:30. The offline day is at Toynbee Hall from 9am - 5.30pm. During both the online and offline days, there are regular breaks every 1-2 hours, and we may be able to adjust the times of those slightly in advance if required (e.g. for needs that arise at a fixed time). We cannot stop the training for additional unscheduled breaks, but if you need to leave the training briefly, you are encouraged to do so.

NEON staff lead most sessions, delivering training slides, but some discussions occur in breakout groups. You will not need to take notes; all the important information is in the [Spokesperson Handbook](#), which is [here](#). There is no need to look at the handbook beforehand as we will send it to you after the training.

Training accessibility

NEON will endeavour to support disabled participants facing additional costs in applying to or participating in the training programme where their employers (where relevant) cannot do so. We will also provide a range of access provisions to any spokespeople who require them.

To ensure that we meet everyone's needs and have the correct provisions in place when we offer spokespeople a place in the training, we will also schedule a 1:1 conversation between them and a member of the NEON team. This will allow the spokesperson to ask questions and discuss any access needs they have to participate in the training. The more we know about how to support participants, the easier it will be for us to do this effectively.

Costs that NEON may be able to cover or contribute towards include:

- Costs for support workers (e.g. personal assistant or carer costs)
- BSL interpreters, Speech to Text Reporters and other forms of communication support (only with advance notice)
- Additional costs for transport and accommodation for disabled trainees, above those that would be faced by someone non-disabled

NEON will also be able to provide:

- Resources ahead of time (e.g. videos to be watched in sessions, information packs, slides, and accessibility information)
- All videos captioned and auto-captions for online Zoom meetings
- Auto-transcript from the auto-captions during online training (note, not for discussions that took place in breakout rooms)
- Resources in printed or alternative formats
- Descriptions of some visual content contained in slides and videos as required (audio-description)
- Some forms of assistive technology to use during training (e.g. hearing loops)
- Recordings from a previous training for participants to use where they have missed a small segment of their training
- Food to meet specific dietary requirements as far as possible (where food is provided to all trainees)

If you are facing costs associated with these or other disability-related costs, please get in touch with us to discuss this further

We do not record each training as the interactions and conversations are a core part of development, and therefore ask that everyone attends all sessions. However, we will have a recording of the presentations available, which we can send after the session to anyone who missed part of a training session (e.g. due to taking a brief break) and wants to catch up.

In-person training access information

The in-person training takes place at [Toynbee Hall](#) in London. The venue is on one level with flat access. There is one standard type accessible toilet, which is gender neutral, but there is no Changing Places toilet. There are also gendered cubicle toilets. The lighting is bright and suitable for lip reading but isn't adjustable. The venue does not provide induction/hearing loops, but NEON can provide them if needed. The training takes place in one room. We cannot usually provide a separate 'break-out' or 'chill-out' space during training, but if you think this is something you will need, please tell us, and we will see whether we can arrange anything.

You can access Toynbee Hall by public transport. [Details of public transport and accessibility are here](#). There is no Blue Badge Parking at Toynbee Hall, but there is Blue Badge parking nearby, and we can provide details of that if you wish. If public transport is not accessible for you, we may be able to help with the cost of your transport.

Following the training, we will go for a drink as a group. We will be using [The Grocer](#) in Spitalfields Market. This venue has wheelchair access and adapted toilets but not Changing Places toilets. The volume of background noise is typically moderate.

We strongly encourage all participants to attend the social after their first training, but it isn't mandatory. For the initial social, we may be able to cover or contribute towards the cost of access support for participants to attend, e.g. by providing a BSL interpreter.

4. Post-programme and media bookings

The Spokesperson Network is constrained by the media environment, which reflects and replicates the structures of oppression in society. Whilst our training supports people to work within this environment and to challenge it, we can't change it. It is a fast-paced environment which requires people to think and react quickly. Part of our training is supporting people to do this. We will work with you to support you as best we can to navigate these barriers, but we want to be transparent about the limitations.

Post-training expectations:

We see the Spokesperson Training as the beginning of our relationship with spokespeople. Once the training is complete, there is an expectation that you are available to do media on issues that are relevant to you. We understand people have other commitments, but we are looking for a degree of flexibility and recognition that media moments are often unpredictable and in unsuitable hours, e.g. the middle of the day.

When people receive media bookings, whilst we are the 'connection' between yourself and the media, we cannot set the conditions the media uses to engage. We will actively work to make broadcasters aware of specific needs and what access support needs to be in place to accommodate people with those needs, but we cannot guarantee that they will provide this support.

How the network works

Whichever NEON staff member is covering the network will look at the major news stories of the day every weekday first thing at 8 a.m. We will then contact anyone on the network via WhatsApp who might be relevant to the story and ask them if they want to be pitched. We ask for top lines from that person and any times they can't do media and put a short, formatted pitch out to (usually) all the bookers and producers we have on our press list. **Timeliness is very important here.** Ideally, we would make contact, get some top lines off you, and put the pitch out to the list within half an hour to an hour. This means **we ask spokespeople to look at their WhatsApps from 8 a.m. every day** to see if we contact them and to be ready to pitch top lines.

During the day, some bookers and producers reply to us and request bookings for those people. We take the requests, contact the relevant spokesperson via WhatsApp with all the information, get their consent, confirm it with all the parties concerned, and ensure that everyone knows what is happening. We aim to do this within 5 minutes to half an hour, so we ask spokespeople to look at their WhatsApps regularly if they know they have been pitched.

Coming to us proactively

We encourage people to come to us with stories that we might be able to pitch them on. This could either be a story in the news that we might have missed (or we might have missed your relevance to the story), or it could be something like a report coming out or an upcoming protest or other sort of event. Sometimes, we can put pitches out in advance - like the day before, so that people doing forward planning in the newsrooms might pick it up and book it in advance.

Every Friday, we email the Forward Planner outlining upcoming stories for the following two weeks. This is an excellent source of possible stories to flag up with us that you might like to be pitched on. It is also your opportunity to flag things you are working on and avoid clashing with other people's plans. If you want to add an event, just add it to the Forward Planner directly. If you would like to be pitched

on an upcoming news story, WhatsApp Kev, Molly or Heather saying you'd be up for being pitched on it, and we will let you know if we plan to do so.

We can also offer advice to determine whether the story/ event is newsworthy enough for a broadcast pitch, but we would still prefer to hear about it from you so that we can make that decision.

Capacity and bookings

Media bookings are unpredictable and depend on how big the news story we are pitching on is, and what else is in the news. You would rarely need to spend a whole day doing media requests when we pitch you. Most often, you may only get one or two bookings off the back of a pitch.

This means that while you don't need to be able to spend a whole day doing media work, you do need to be flexible to accommodate bookings when they come in, as the timings cannot be predicted. For example, only being free *2 p.m.-4 p.m. isn't very useful, but saying you have an immovable meeting 3 p.m.-4 p.m., but everything else could be pushed back by 10 - 15 mins* is far more useful.

In general, you only need enough time to do the usual 'back of the envelope' preparation, a very quick practice, time to do the interview, and a little self-care afterwards.

We would expect Spokespeople to accept nearly all of the requests that come in. It's essential to prioritise your well-being and mental health, and no one should do anything they are uncomfortable with. Equally, producers look for people who are regularly up for bookings, so if we turn too many down, they are less likely to book you in the future. However, we would always rather you came to us, and we can discuss it.

Booking locations

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, most interviews are now conducted online via Zoom or FaceTime. However, sometimes producers request that a Spokesperson conduct interviews in person. Sometimes, they wish to film in a location near a Spokesperson's home (or in their home). If it is in the studio or on a specific site, we can request a cab and discuss any other access needs you have for the location where the interview takes place. Studios usually have wheelchair access and adapted toilets.

Spokespeople need a working laptop, a strong internet connection and a webcam that works. This is both for the training and ongoing interviews. If you need access to a webcam, please message us, but unfortunately, we can't support you with a laptop or internet. Several organisations can offer grants towards the cost of laptops and internet for people and organisations, so if this is a barrier for you, we encourage you to research this as you may be able to find a device that way.

Access needs and media bookings:

As we connect Spokespeople with the media, we are in a position to communicate your access needs to producers, but we are not able to enforce or insist specific provisions are in place. If you need accessibility provisions and we know in advance, we can discuss these with producers. These might include:

- Auto-captions
- BSL interpreter, speech-to-text reporter, or other communication support
- Wheelchair access (where the booking is taking place on location or in a studio)
- Taxis to and from the booking (where it is taking place on location or in a studio)
- Masks to be worn around you (e.g. for protection against respiratory infections)
- Particular requirements (e.g. being able to take part in a panel but not to take calls from

viewers)

If you have specific and consistent requirements, we can support you in creating a document known as an 'access rider' that communicates clearly to media partners what they need in place to work with you. This will speed up ensuring they have the appropriate access provisions in place.

If it is one of your first bookings or a particularly challenging booking, a member of the NEON team will also be happy to discuss the interview before it takes place and help ensure you feel confident and prepared.

5. Thank you

Thank you for reading this pack. We appreciate there is a lot to get through and also that there are many things we are still working on. If you have any suggestions on improving this pack or any questions or comments, please email Molly at molly@neweconomyorganisers.org or Enez at enez@neweconomyorganisers.org.