



Basic practices for inclusiveness

Tips and guidelines to foster participation,
belonging and representation
for diverse user groups

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Summary

This resource offers practical suggestions on how a make-a-thek space and its community can become more inclusive, diverse and welcoming, especially for people who may feel under-represented, less visible, or less confident in joining making activities.

The resource is not exhaustive. What can be changed, improved or adapted depends strongly on the local context, available resources, community needs and institutional possibilities. For this reason, the following tips are intended as starting points for reflection and action, rather than as fixed solutions.

Inclusiveness and accessibility are closely connected. This resource focuses mainly on participation, belonging, representation, community practices and welcoming behaviours.

→ More specific guidance on physical, sensory, cognitive and economic accessibility is addressed in the resource [Basic Principles of Accessible Space](#)

What does inclusiveness mean in a make-a-thek (maker)space?

When we talk about inclusiveness, we refer to the conscious effort to make people feel welcome, respected, represented and able to participate in day-to-day activities.

In a make-a-thek, this means asking:

- Who currently feels welcome in the space?
- Who is missing?
- Who feels confident enough to participate?
- Who may feel excluded, intimidated or not represented?
- What behaviours, rules, formats or assumptions may create barriers?
- What can we change to make participation easier and more meaningful?

A make-a-thek should not only provide access to tools and machines. It should also **create the conditions for people to feel that they belong, that their knowledge matters, and that they can learn, experiment and contribute at their own pace.**

If we want to make a space more inclusive, we have to think about what currently makes the space less inclusive and welcoming.

Creating a welcoming atmosphere is as important as removing barriers. If we want to invite new groups of people into a space and community, we also need to consider what makes people stay and feel part of that community.

1. First steps towards an inclusive make-a-thek (maker)space

There are some basic practices that can help create a more inclusive environment from the beginning.

Be clear against discrimination

If you want to welcome newcomers, especially people from under-represented or marginalised groups, it is important to create a safe and respectful environment.

Be explicit about the make-a-thek's position against any form of discrimination, including discrimination based on gender, age, ethnicity, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, language, cultural background or social condition.

This stance should not remain implicit. It should be visible in the way the space communicates, welcomes users, trains facilitators and responds to problematic behaviour.

Publish a Code of Conduct

A Code of Conduct **defines shared norms, responsibilities and appropriate behaviours within a space or community. It can also be understood as a social agreement.**

A good Code of Conduct should:

- clearly state that discrimination, harassment or exclusionary behaviour are not accepted;
- describe what kind of behaviour is encouraged;
- explain what users can do if they feel uncomfortable or experience a problem;
- clarify possible consequences if the rules are not respected;
- present inclusiveness as a core value of the space.

The Code of Conduct should not only say what is forbidden. It should also **describe the community you want to build.**

Co-create and review the Code of Conduct

A Code of Conduct should not be written once and then forgotten. Invite a diverse group of people to **give feedback, contribute, revise and adapt it over time. Communities evolve, and the Code of Conduct should be able to evolve with them.**

Ask periodically:

- *Is this still understandable?*
- *Does it reflect the people who use the space?*
- *Is anything missing?*
- *Do users know where to find it?*
- *Do staff and facilitators know how to apply it?*



Reflect on what, how and why you do things

Inclusiveness is not only about single actions. It is also about the everyday practices of the space.

Discuss within the team and community:

- *What are we doing?*
- *Who are we doing it for?*
- *Who is participating?*
- *Who is not participating?*
- *How do we communicate?*
- *Who feels represented?*
- *Who feels confident enough to ask questions?*
- *Which assumptions are shaping our activities?*

Regular reflection helps the make-a-thek become more aware of exclusionary dynamics that may otherwise remain invisible.

Establish an awareness person or team

An awareness person or team can act as a first contact point for feedback, discomfort, conflicts or requests for support. This role should not only reinforce the Code of Conduct, but also help users feel that there is someone they can approach if something does not feel right. Where possible, the awareness team should include more than one person, so that users can choose who they feel most comfortable talking to.

2. Representation and shared responsibilities

An inclusive make-a-thek is shaped by the people who organize, facilitate and care for it. Ask:

- *Who is in charge of the space?*
- *Who makes decisions?*
- *Who facilitates workshops?*
- *Who welcomes newcomers?*
- *Who is visible as an expert, trainer or mentor?*
- *Who is missing from these roles?*

Representation matters. Having people of different genders, ages, ethnicities, abilities, cultural backgrounds or life experiences visibly involved in the space can help different needs and interests emerge.

It can also encourage new users to participate. People are more likely to feel welcome when they can recognise someone with whom they identify, or when they see that the space is not owned by only one type of user.

This does not mean selecting people only because of identity. It means reflecting on how responsibilities, visibility and opportunities are distributed, and whether the space is unintentionally reproducing the same forms of exclusion it wants to challenge.

3. Inclusive events and scheduling

Every event, workshop or activity is also a moment where inclusiveness is either strengthened or weakened.

Choose facilitators carefully

When organizing an activity, consider who leads it.

A facilitator, trainer or moderator can influence who feels invited to join. Representation in facilitation roles may encourage people who usually feel distant from making, repair, machines or technology to participate. Ask:

- *Does the facilitator reflect the audience we want to reach?*
- *Can they work with different levels of experience?*
- *Can they explain without being intimidating?*
- *Are they attentive to different learning speeds?*
- *Are they able to create a welcoming atmosphere?*

Make invitations more inclusive

Invitations should use clear, encouraging and accessible language. They should explain who the event is for, what participants will do, whether previous experience is needed, and how newcomers will be supported. Avoid communication that makes the activity sound only for experts, unless it really is an advanced session.

Useful information to include:

- beginner-friendly or not;
- language of the activity;
- age group;
- whether materials are provided;
- whether participants need to bring something;
- accessibility information;
- whether accompanying persons are welcome;
- contact point for questions.

Vary scheduling

If the same type of people always participate, the issue may not be interest. It may be timing. Try different days and times where possible. People have different responsibilities, schedules, constraints and energy levels. Ask:

- *Are events always in the evening? Are weekends ever offered?*
- *Are school and care responsibilities considered?*
- *Are religious holidays or specific community calendars considered?*
- *Could the same activity be tested at different times?*

Create targeted activities

Sometimes, a dedicated activity for a specific group can lower the threshold for participation. Examples:

- newcomer workshops;
- women-only or gender-specific sessions;
- family-friendly activities;
- youth workshops;
- activities for older adults;
- activities co-designed with local associations;
- sessions for people who do not feel confident with technology.

Dedicated activities should always be designed with attention to the actual needs and expectations of the group involved, preferably through dialogue with people or organizations already connected to that community.

Consider care responsibilities

Some people cannot participate if care responsibilities are ignored. Possible approaches include:

- clear information about whether children can attend - offering child-friendly activities, or activities where caretakers and children work side by side, or separate childcare, if feasible;
- shorter and flexible participation formats.



4. Outreach and community partnerships

If your make-a-thek mostly attracts the same kind of users, recognising this is already a first step. The next step is to ask why some groups are not present and how to reach them respectfully.

Outreach should not be understood as simply “inviting more people”. It means building relationships with groups, associations, schools, initiatives and communities that already work with the people you want to involve.

Possible partners include: local associations; schools and youth groups; cultural organizations; community centres; migrant associations; disability advocacy groups; women’s groups; senior centres; local repair or craft communities; social cooperatives; neighbourhood initiatives. When reaching out, focus on dialogue:

- *What would be useful for this group?*
- *What would make participation easier?*
- *What activities would be meaningful?*
- *What should we avoid?*
- *What can we co-create together?*

Partnerships can help make the make-a-thek more relevant, more trusted and more embedded in its local context.

5. Welcoming newcomers and building belonging

Opening the space is not enough. People need to feel welcome when they arrive, and they need reasons to return.

A welcoming make-a-thek should make newcomers feel that:

- they are allowed to ask questions;
- they do not need to be experts;
- mistakes are part of learning;
- different skills are valued;
- they can contribute even if they are new;
- they understand how the space works;
- they know who to ask for help.

Make first steps visible

For a newcomer, a makerspace can be intimidating. Machines, tools, materials and expert language may create distance.

Help newcomers by making the first steps clear:

- where to go;
- who to talk to;
- what they can try first;
- what is free to use;
- what requires supervision;
- what activities are beginner-friendly;
- how they can become more involved.

Use a mentoring approach

Mentoring can help newcomers enter the community more easily.

Long-term members, facilitators or trained users can act as mentors by:

- showing people around;
- explaining how the space works;
- introducing basic tools;
- helping with first projects;
- answering informal questions;
- connecting newcomers with other users.

Mentoring can happen during regular activities, open sessions or dedicated newcomer events.

Offer financial support and shared resources for making

Some people may not have had the chance to become part of a making community because tools, materials, machines or participation fees were not accessible to them.

If your space requires a fee, consider offering a free trial period for newcomers or a sliding pay scale based on trust. This means providing different fee tiers that people can choose from according to their financial possibilities, without requiring them to prove their situation. Having to demonstrate financial difficulty can be uncomfortable, complex or shameful, and may discourage people from participating.

Other practical options include offering different pricing models for different levels of use, such as lower-cost access for limited weekly use, or more flexible access for people who need it.

Materials and tools can also create economic barriers. To lower this threshold, the make-a-thek can provide a basic collection of shared tools and low-cost or free materials for first projects. Simple materials such as fabrics, wool, donated garments, paper, thread, offcuts, or filament for 3D printing can help newcomers begin without needing to buy everything themselves.

A donation box or shared material shelf for leftover materials can also make resources more affordable and accessible, while reinforcing circularity and mutual support within the community.

Offer beginner-friendly entry points

Many newcomers do not arrive with a clear project in mind. Some may never have been encouraged to repair, tinker, sew, build or use machines. Beginner-friendly projects help people gain confidence and imagine what they could do next.

Offer a small number of easy first-time projects that are: simple, clearly explained, low-cost, achievable in one session, connected to useful or meaningful outputs, supported by tutorials or facilitators.

Examples: a small repair; a simple patch; a basic stitching exercise; a label or sticker; a small upcycling project; a material sample; a first machine demonstration.



6. Language and communication

Not everyone interested in joining the space may speak the local language fluently. Offering basic information in more than one language can make the space more accessible and welcoming. Consider translating: opening times; basic rules; safety instructions; event descriptions; how to join; who to contact; beginner activity instructions. You can also **ask community members what languages they speak and whether they are willing to support translation or interpretation.**

In some contexts, **sign language interpretation or visual communication** may open the space to new user groups.

Inclusive communication is not only about translation. It is also about **tone**. Use language that is:

- clear, and non-technical where possible;
- encouraging, respectful, and explicit about who is welcome;
- honest about what support is available.

Checklist

Use this checklist as a conversation starter with your team or community. Not every make-a-thek will be able to implement everything immediately. Select what can be done now and identify long-term goals.

Reaching out to newcomers

- ☐ Identify which groups are present in the space and which are missing.
- ☐ Reflect on the factors that may prevent some people from joining.
- ☐ Reach out to local organizations or initiatives connected to under-represented groups.
- ☐ Organize newcomer workshops or beginner-friendly events.
- ☐ Offer guidance for easy first-time projects.
- ☐ Provide mentoring or informal support for newcomers.

Making people feel welcome

- ☐ Publish a visible Code of Conduct.
- ☐ Clearly state the space's position against discrimination.
- ☐ Describe the behaviours the community wants to encourage.
- ☐ Establish an awareness person or team that users can contact.
- ☐ Welcome feedback from newcomers and take it seriously.
- ☐ Be ready to adapt practices when something does not work.

Team and responsibilities

- ☐ Review who is visible as a facilitator, mentor, expert or trainer.
- ☐ Encourage representation of different genders, ages, abilities, cultural backgrounds and experiences.
- ☐ Review selection and hiring practices with inclusiveness in mind.
- ☐ Share responsibilities in ways that avoid gatekeeping.
- ☐ Make different forms of knowledge and expertise visible and valued.

Events and scheduling

- ☐ Offer different types of events for different levels of experience.
- ☐ Include events specifically designed for newcomers.
- ☐ Choose facilitators with the target audience in mind.
- ☐ Use accessible, non-intimidating language in event descriptions.
- ☐ Test different days and times for activities.
- ☐ Consider care responsibilities when planning events.
- ☐ Create family-friendly or caretaker-inclusive formats where appropriate.
- ☐ Offer translation or language support when needed.

Language and communication

- ☐ Provide basic information in more than one language where useful.
- ☐ Make instructions understandable for people without technical experience.
- ☐ Use a welcoming and encouraging tone.
- ☐ Clearly explain how the space works and how people can join.
- ☐ Make contact points visible for users who need clarification or support.

Economic participation and shared resources

- ☐ Offer free or low-cost entry options for newcomers where possible.
- ☐ Use flexible or trust-based pricing if fees are required.
- ☐ Avoid asking people to prove financial difficulty when accessing reduced fees.
- ☐ Provide access to basic shared tools, so users do not need to buy their own.
- ☐ Offer free or low-cost materials for first projects.
- ☐ Create a shared shelf, donation box or material library for leftover and donated materials.
- ☐ Make economic barriers part of the inclusion discussion, not only a practical management issue.
- ☐ Communicate clearly which materials, tools or activities are free, low-cost or paid.

Belonging and community

- ☐ Create opportunities for users to contribute their own knowledge.
- ☐ Recognize different forms of expertise, including informal, practical and community-based skills.
- ☐ Treat mistakes as part of learning.
- ☐ Invite users to participate in shaping the space and its activities.
- ☐ Create reasons for people to return after their first visit.
- ☐ Support a culture of mutual help, shared responsibility and collective learning.

References

The basis for this manual was a first version published by [Cin Pietschmann](#) and the [Critical Making](#) project team and discussed with makers from around the world (<https://criticalmaking.eu/creating-an-inclusive-and-welcoming-maker-space>). This first version was adapted to the specific context of makerspaces in public libraries.