

Creating Inclusive Workplace Events

A Best Practice Guide to Alcohol Free Alternatives



Workplace events play a powerful role in fostering connection, culture, and a sense of belonging. But when social gatherings are centred around alcohol, they can unintentionally exclude many colleagues, and these types of events carry increased reputational and legal risks, not to mention costs.

This resource is part of our Creating Inclusive Workplace Events Toolkit and is for People Leaders, HR Professionals, Workplace Teams and Events Managers, and those who are working on employee engagement activations. More broadly, this resource will support those who are committed to inclusive and accessible workplaces to embed best practice in their everyday work programmes. It will:

- Help you reframe how you plan social events
- Offer practical tips for alcohol-free or alcohol-considerate options
- Share examples of inclusive events that meet diverse needs

Why alcohol-centred events can be exclusionary

People may choose not to drink alcohol for a wide variety of personal, cultural, religious, or health-related reasons. For some, it's a matter of faith or tradition; for others, it may be linked to recovery from addiction, medical needs, or simply personal preference. Some people may have experienced trauma connected to alcohol, while others may avoid it due to sensory sensitivities or because it doesn't align with their lifestyle. Whatever the reason, alcohol-centred events can unintentionally exclude or isolate people, making it harder for everyone to feel welcome, valued, and able to take part fully. There are many reasons that mean that someone might not drink alcohol, including:

- Health conditions or medication
- Faith or religious beliefs
- Neurodivergence or sensory sensitivity
- Personal recovery from addiction
- Pregnancy or fertility journeys
- Trauma history
- Personal preference
- Caring responsibilities or long commutes

But remember, no one has to explain their reason to anyone else.

Events that revolve around alcohol can unintentionally create barriers to inclusion

While social gatherings are an important part of team culture, making alcohol the main focus, or promoting that alcohol will be available, can exclude or alienate people for a range of personal, cultural, or health-related reasons. When the expectation to drink is present—whether spoken or unspoken—it can leave some colleagues feeling uncomfortable, disconnected, or pressured to conform. This can reduce psychological safety and undermine efforts to build a truly inclusive environment. These types of events can

- Create feelings of isolation
- Reinforce cliques or cultural norms that aren't welcoming to everyone
- Create a risk of inappropriate behaviour, including harassment
- Impact productivity and wellbeing the next day

Examples of Exclusion and Impact:

- A Muslim colleague is invited to a pub quiz where beer is the main attraction, making them feel their faith is not respected.
- A colleague in recovery from alcohol addiction feels pressured to explain their choices or skip the event altogether.
- A neurodivergent employee avoids noisy, overstimulating pub nights, missing informal networking that leads to advancement opportunities.
- A parent or carer who needs to leave by 5:30 p.m. is left out of after-hours drinks and team bonding.
- An employee on medication, or prioritising their health, may find few non-alcoholic options available and feel isolated.
- Someone who has experienced trauma may find alcohol-fuelled environments triggering and unsafe.

When events rely heavily on alcohol, they risk becoming exclusive and uncomfortable for many. This can lead to disengagement, increased absence, and reputational or legal consequences for the organisation.

Legal & organisational risks

Under UK law, employers may be held liable for alcohol-related misconduct at workplace events. Failing to consider inclusion could also impact talent attraction, retention, and wellbeing.

Creating inclusive events means thinking beyond the usual and recognising that alcohol-fuelled socials can leave people out. Inclusion is about respecting the full spectrum of people's experiences and planning events that foster belonging without pressure or risk.

What does an inclusive event look like?

An inclusive workplace event is one where everyone feels welcome, respected, and able to take part in ways that suit them best. It's thoughtfully planned with the understanding that people have different needs, preferences, and experiences. Inclusion goes beyond just inviting everyone — it's about removing barriers and creating a sense of belonging for all: An inclusive event:

- Considers access, dietary, and social needs and puts in place provisions to respond to these needs
- Offers choice and flexibility in how people participate and actively communicates options
- Encourages connection, not conformity
- Reflects the diversity of the workforce

Checklist for inclusive planning

We know there is a lot to think about when starting to plan inclusive events. It can feel overwhelming when you do this for the first time. This checklist can help you get started:

1. Start with Inclusion: Ask, "Who might feel excluded from this event and why?"
2. Offer Alternatives: If alcohol is available, provide high-quality alcohol-free options like mocktails, alcohol-free beer/wine, or flavoured sparkling waters.
3. Think Beyond Booze: Create events where alcohol isn't the focal point.
4. Communicate Clearly: Include all drink and food options in invites. Ask about access and dietary needs upfront.
5. Set Expectations: Remind attendees of respectful behaviour, especially at hybrid or external events.
6. Create Psychological Safety: Let people know it's okay to leave early or not drink.
7. Consider Financial Fairness: Avoid costly pay-your-way drinks or dinner. Provide free, inclusive refreshments where possible.
8. Celebrate All Voices: Collaborate with ERGs to co-design inclusive experiences.

What not to do

- Charge for soft drinks while alcohol is free
- Assume everyone will stay out late, will want to or can afford to
- Use alcohol as a reward or incentive

Planning inclusive events doesn't mean losing the fun—it means widening the invitation. This checklist helps ensure your event considers diverse needs, avoids unintended harm, and reflects your organisation's values of inclusion and wellbeing.

Alcohol free alternative social events

Here are tried-and-tested alcohol-free alternatives with suggestions on how to run them successfully:

Low-Key, High-Connection

- **Knit and Natter:** Host a drop-in lunchtime or afterwork group. Provide basic materials or encourage people to bring their own knitting or craft projects. Add tea and biscuits and allow informal chats to build connection.
- **Board Game Lunchtime Socials:** Set up a few tables with different games (e.g. Uno, Connect 4, Scrabble). Ideal for mixed teams and open to all abilities.
- **Walk and Talk:** Organise a 20–30-minute lunchtime or afterwork group walk. Offer options with different paces or themes and accessible routes (e.g. wellbeing check-ins, new joiner walks).
- **Sip and Paint:** Provide art supplies and soft drinks or mocktails. Offer a simple prompt (like “paint your happy place”) and play relaxing music. These sessions can be offered in person or virtually.
- **Book Clubs:** Choose a short story, article, or theme each month. Use a shared Teams or Slack channel to gather thoughts and schedule in-person or virtual meetups.
- **Puzzle Club or Lego Club:** Provide shared jigsaw puzzles or Lego sets in break areas. Great for quiet minds and neurodivergent colleagues.

Learning & Growth

- **Lunch and Learns:** Invite internal or external speakers to lead 30–45 minute sessions. Topics could include allyship, health, financial wellbeing, or leadership journeys.
- **TED Talk & Discussion Sessions:** Share a short talk (under 15 minutes), then open the floor for reflection. Provide discussion prompts ahead of time.
- **Speaker Spotlights:** Feature employee voices in ‘In My Shoes’ sessions to share lived experience or career journeys.
- **Crafting Skill Swaps:** Encourage employees to teach or demo skills—such as making jewellery, calligraphy, or baking techniques.
- **Financial Wellbeing Workshops:** Partner with providers to host accessible sessions on saving, budgeting, or pensions.

Movement & Mindfulness

- **Yoga or Stretch & Breathe:** Offer 20-minute online or in-person sessions. Tailor for all bodies and levels.
- **Guided Meditation Sessions:** Use apps like Insight Timer or Calm to lead 5–10 minute group meditations.
- **Dance Breaks or Silent Disco:** Great for energising teams—offer a playlist and headphones for a mid-afternoon lift.
- **Walking Meetings:** Encourage teams to take 1:1s or catchups on the move where possible.

Celebration & Culture

- Mocktail Making Masterclasses: Hire a mixologist or run a DIY tutorial. Include kits or recipe cards for hybrid teams.
- International Food Potlucks: Ask employees to bring a dish that represents their culture or upbringing (include allergens labelling guidance).
- Film Clubs: Pick short films or documentaries, then host a discussion.
- Cultural Festival Celebrations: Collaborate with Employee Resource Groups to host inclusive activities marking Diwali, Pride, Ramadan, Lunar New Year, etc.

Top tips from Inclusion Included

Every event and employee engagement activation is an opportunity to build a culture of belonging. Inclusion doesn't need to be complicated — it needs to be intentional. The practical tips in this resource will help you create events where everyone feels considered and able to take part fully. Don't forget:

- Make inclusion part of every planning meeting — not an afterthought
- Invite feedback from your people — and act on what you hear
- Partner with your internal DEI team or staff networks (ERGs)
- Model inclusive behaviour as a leader — your actions set the tone
- And if alcohol is involved in your workplace social events, make sure you've done a risk assessment and that it's on your risk register.

Inclusive events are easy to create when intention and planning are front and centre. When you shift from exclusive socials to inclusive spaces, you make room for everyone to feel welcome, seen, and valued.

Whether you're organising a lunch, conference, away day or celebration — think, Inclusion Included, Always.

Need further help? [Get in touch](#) and we'll help you design events that don't just bring people together, but truly include them.

You can also reach out to Neil Hudson-Basing, via [LinkedIn](#) or [LinkTree](#) who will expertly guide you through the steps you can take to create alcohol-free social events.

Rethink your next event. Make it meaningful. Make it inclusive. Make it count.