**Attitude Foundation Content Guidelines**

A guide for accessible and inclusive content

\* Other accessible formats available on request.

**ATTITUDE FOUNDATION - SUMMARY**

**Our mission**

It has been frequently identified that “attitude” plays a significant role in driving and entrenching society’s negative and limiting assumptions of disability and in creating or contributing to many of the barriers that result in the exclusion of people with disability from every area of life.

The Foundation was created in July 2014 in direct response to the critical need to change cultural attitudes in order to relieve the social injustices that people with disability in Australia continue to experience; social injustices that diminish their human rights and prevent them from being fully included as equal citizens.

The mission of the Foundation is to change attitudes to disability primarily through the media, by stimulating a culture of acceptance, non-discrimination and inclusion of people with disability.

The Foundation believes that "Change must occur at the broadest level for improvement to be seen at the level of the individual" (as identified in the PwC report *Disability expectations*). As such, its activities are directed at reshaping broad cultural perspectives of disability and empowering and building the agency and capacity of people with disability as full participants in political, social, economic and cultural life.

The Foundation recognises that there is no “silver bullet” available to change historical and entrenched low expectations or the discrimination, prejudice, stigmatization and hostility that people with disability continue to experience. However, the Foundation believes that in this age, where the media is a significant driver in shaping how we perceive the world around us and how we act in it, the media can also be a tool for social change, in reshaping attitudes to, and outcomes for, people with disability. What is certain is that media content is never “neutral” and the impact of the media’s portrayal of people with disability on community attitudes must not be underestimated.

The Foundation will pursue its mission through a media-focused strategy that includes working to:

1. strive for the production of media content that promotes respect for the rights, capabilities, skills, merit and contributions of people with disability and challenges myths, negative stereotypes and prejudices about people with disability; and
2. provide opportunities for individual agency and empowerment through the direct participation of people with disability in the Australian media, by using the production of media content for the Foundation as a vehicle to train people with disability to work in media.

The Foundation is committed to the pursuit of its mission with people with disability, and to collaboration with a range of groups and individuals including disability and other organizations, media professionals, government and policy-makers and allies who share this mission.

**Who we are**

The Attitude Foundation was established in 2014 by people who are passionate about the inclusion of people with disability in society and are passionate storytellers. Our Board holds extensive experience in human rights, not-for-profit organisations and the media.

We will create an environment which empowers people with disability to live their lives uninhibited by negative or limiting assumptions & discrimination. Our actions will shape a new understanding of the contribution to be made by people with disability throughout Australia. This social change will improve the lives of people with disability and facilitate our full inclusion in society.

To learn more about us, please visit http://www.attitude.org.au/our\_people

**GUIDELINES**

**1. Purpose of guidelines**

The purpose of this document (the **Guidelines**) is to detail the Foundation’s approach to the production of media content:

1. by or for the Foundation;
2. with the participation, collaboration or assistance of the Foundation; or
3. that is otherwise identified with the Foundation’s brand,

(in this document “**Attitude media content”**).

The information outlined in this document does not form part of any contract for the production of Attitude media content. Further, this document does not contain exhaustive guidelines for all aspects of Attitude media content and does not detail the guidelines for the protection of children involved in Attitude media content. Please refer to any other documents, policies or guidelines as may be relevant.

.**2. Scope**

These Guidelines are intended to apply to all Attitude media content.

**3. Sourcing and production of content for Attitude media content**

In line with the Foundation’s objectives of individual empowerment and building the agency and capacity of people with disability and, where possible, using the production of Attitude media content as a vehicle to develop the skills of people with disability in the media sector, the Foundation will ensure that both the sourcing of stories or other content for Attitude media content and the engagement of people in the production of Attitude media content, are undertaken through open, transparent, inclusive and accessible processes including, where relevant, consultation with the Australian disability sector and directly with people with disability themselves.

**4. Accessibility of content**

The Attitude Foundation is committed to creating and distributing content that is accessible to and inclusive of people of all identities and abilities.

The Foundation will endeavor to make all content created or distributed available in alternative formats to accommodate individual requirements and resources. Alternative formats include but are not limited to: large print, braille, audio description, audio transcript, captioned video, sign language, plain English and simpler language.

Print/physical documents will be designed in a manner that is accessible and aids comprehension. Content creators will consider the function of elements such as font, colour, colour contrast, document structure/reading order and spacing when determining the accessibility of a document.

Any content created or provided by the Foundation online or in an electronic format will comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 as published by the World Wide Web Consortium. Content will be distributed in a format that is compatible with multiple devices, operating systems, applications and assistive technologies.

When appropriate, the Foundation will engage the services of translators to provide content in languages other than English.

Content that is commissioned, created or distributed by the Foundation will use language as mandated in section 5.2 Use of Language of these Guidelines. Content creators will be mindful of the intersection of diverse biases and types of discrimination, making an effort to include and not to alienate or stigmatise people of diverse race, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexuality, gender, age, socio-economic status or class, or legal status.

**5. Nature of content**

**5.1 The Foundation’s objectives**

The Foundation aims to:

1. establish a media platform that supports individual agency and empowerment for Australians with disability; and
2. reshape community attitudes to disability.

As such, Attitude media content must aim to stimulate a *change* in community attitudes to disability rather than merely *reflect* prevailing cultural attitudes. It is about using the media as a vehicle for social change, to encourage authentic dialogue and reframe the community's understanding of disability by challenging the negative and limiting ways in which the dominant able-bodied culture continues to frame disability, including through mass media.

The following questions should always be asked in respect of Attitude media content:

(a) Are people with disability in control of their narrative and are their voices being heard? (eg *who* is telling "the story"? *Whose* perspective is being shared?)

(b) Does the portrayal of disability:

(i) reflect **authentic** stories and experiences, or misrepresent people with disability and how they interact with the world?;

(ii) either avoid, challenge or entrench myths, negative **stereotypes** or perspectives on disability? (eg "supercrip", “non-sexual”, "cute/ infantilised adult” with intellectual disability);

(iii) patronise or "**objectify**" people with disability for the benefit of others (eg. as objects of "inspiration" merely because of disability, “pity”, etc); and

(iv) acknowledge the role of social – including physical, systemic and attitudinal - barriers for people with disability or just focus on “medical” aspects of impairment or the search for “treatments” and “cures”?

**5.1.1 Narrative control – the person at the centre**

Attitude media content should reflect the Foundation’s objective of empowerment of people with disability by respecting the right of people with disability to express themselves and their individual perspectives and to tell their own stories.

To that end, stories about people with disability should be told in their own words or through their preferred means of individual communication and expression. However, in recognition of the fact that there may be situations where direct storytelling is not possible or where it is the preference of the person with disability at the centre of the story, stories may be told through or facilitated by those closest to them, while always remaining faithful to the objective of reflecting the perspective of the person at the centre.

Where relevant, it may be appropriate for Attitude media content to also include the viewpoints of others (such as parents, family members, friends, carers, etc) but this should be done with regard to the person with disability remaining in control of the narrative; while other voices may also be valid, they must not overwhelm or drown out the voices of people with disability which have been excluded for so long.

**5.1.2 Portrayal of disability**

Society’s understanding of disability as a cultural phenomenon predominantly reflects the perspective of able-bodied people and this is, in turn, is reflected in and reinforced by media images and narratives relating to disability. The choice of words, images and messages used to portray disability can contribute strongly to perceptions, attitudes and behaviours towards people with disability. Those choices can also help to define what is and isn't important to individuals and to society.

Attitude media content will aim to present authentic portrayal and advance dialogue about disability that acknowledges the significance and impact of historical issues and existing barriers to the realisation of rights and the inclusion of people with disability in every area of life, arising from the way in which society is organized and from cultural perceptions and attitudes to disability.

Attitude media content will seek to reflect a perspective of disability as a natural and legitimate part of the human experience and encourage recognition of people with disability as diverse individuals. To that end, Attitude media content will be sensitive to the potential to reinforce negative myths and stereotypes about people with disability and avoid any portrayal that is likely to be perceived as patronising or objectifying.

As an overarching principle, Attitude media content content will be developed within the framework and objects of the Convention on the Right of Persons With Disabilities, including Article 8 which relevantly provides as follows.

"1. States Parties undertake to adopt immediate, effective and appropriate measures:

a) To raise awareness throughout society, including at the family level, regarding persons with disabilities, and to foster respect for the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities;

b) To combat stereotypes, prejudices and harmful practices relating to persons with disabilities, including those based on sex and age, in all areas of life;

c) To promote awareness of the capabilities and contributions of persons with disabilities.

2. Measures to this end include:

a) Initiating and maintaining effective public awareness campaigns designed:

1. To nurture receptiveness to the rights of persons with disabilities;
2. To promote positive perceptions and greater social awareness towards persons with disabilities;
3. To promote recognition of the skills, merits and abilities of persons with disabilities, and of their contributions to the workplace and the labour market;

b) Fostering at all levels of the education system, including in all children from an early age, an attitude of respect for the rights of persons with disabilities;

c) Encouraging all organs of the media to portray persons with disabilities in a manner consistent with the purpose of the present Convention;

d) Promoting awareness-training programmes regarding persons with disabilities and the rights of persons with disabilities."

**5.2 Diversity**

Attitude media content will seek to reflect the diversity across individual experiences of disability and tell the stories of people with physical or mobility impairments, people with sensory, cognitive or intellectual impairments, people with diverse appearance, people with acquired disability and people who have lived with disability from birth. This will include the stories of people whose impairment or disability may not be visible or apparent.

Attitude media content will also be produced with sensitivity to the way that disability intersects with other factors. For example, women and girls with disability face discrimination on several fronts, experiencing marginalisation and exclusion because of their gender and their disability. Similarly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians with disability also face race discrimination.

**5.3 Use of language**

Language used to refer to or describe people with disability in media is important; It helps to shape what the community understands about disability and it also has ramifications for how people with disability see themselves.

However, the starting point must be **the way in which people wish to identify themselves**. People with disability are a diverse range of people and not everyone identifies himself or herself in the same way.

Attitude media content respects the way in which people with disability want to identify and the language that they prefer others to use when referring to them.

Some people expressly identify as “disabled people” which places their disabled identify first (“identity-first” language) and may be an expression of disability as being central to a person’s identity (similarly to race or gender, for example) or reflect idea that they are “disabled” by social barriers, whereas others may prefer the term “people with disability” (“person-first” language) reflecting the historical struggle to be recognised as human beings rather than labels or diagnosis.

In these Guidelines we have adopted “person-first” language as the language used in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which is broadly acknowledged to be the most comprehensive statement on the rights of people with disability. However, we acknowledge that both “person-first” and “identity-first” language are valid and can be seen as empowering for different reasons.

Similarly, there are people within specific disability communities that prefer identity-first language whereas others may insist on person-first language (eg some people self-identify with the term “Autistic” whereas others adopt “person with Autism”). In some disability communities (but not all) there may be a strong consensus on preferred language (eg “person with Down syndrome” is the overwhelming preferred term in the Down syndrome community whereas the Deaf and Blind communities generally prefer identify-first language).

In some cases, people may wish to self-identify using terms that they do not feel comfortable being used by others who are outside their disability community (eg. “crip”, “gimp”, etc).

The most important thing is to recognise the diverse ways in which people wish to define themselves and ask the person with disability how they choose to self-identify and how they wish others to refer to them – and respect their choice.

Some terms that were deemed acceptable at various times in history are now considered to be in the nature of disability slurs (eg “retarded”, “mongoloid”, “spastic” and derivations of those words) and others (eg. “handicapped”, “wheel-chair bound” or “confined to a wheelchair”, “deformed”) are not considered to be appropriate by most groups of people with disability. Other terms are also considered problematic because they are commonly used in framing disability in the media in a way that stereotypes or objectifies people with disability (eg “suffer”, “stricken”, “afflicted”, “inspirational, “brave”, “tragic”, “overcoming”, “dependent”, “sick”, “victim”, “patient”, etc).

Attitude media content will be deliberate and sensitive to the use of language in telling stories or describing the experience of disability, having regard to modern disability language that focuses on rights and empowerment for people with disability.