

Vital Practices in the Arts

Vital Practices in the Arts is a resource guide for documenting, producing, and sharing arts and knowledge in ways that are accessible, collaborative, and disruptive.

This guide is produced by ***Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology, and Access to Life (BIT)*** with collaborating partners **Tangled Art + Disability** and **Creative Users Projects**. Our understanding of accessibility is iterative, intersectional, and led by the disability community. We seek to move accessibility beyond a logistic concern to a disability justice framework.¹

BIT is a university-community research project that explores how cultivating activist art leads to social and political justice. Activist art refers to Disability art, d/Deaf art, Mad art, aging and e/Elder art, and fat art. We bring these arts together because non-normatively embodied people are often viewed as non-vital and unable to contribute to the cultural fabric of our society. Therefore, we challenge these assumptions by cultivating and showcasing non-normative artistic production.

We acknowledge that we live and create on Indigenous lands from different positionalities - as Indigenous, First Nations, Inuit, and Metis people, and as settlers, immigrants, refugees, and stateless people. It is urgent for non-Indigenous people to critically reflect on how we contribute to and benefit from settler colonization, and simultaneously consider how to follow Indigenous leadership and work to decolonize activist arts.

¹ Mia Mingus, "[Moving Toward the Ugly: A politic beyond desirability.](#)" Leaving Evidence (blog), August 22, 2011. Patty Berne, "[Disability Justice: A working draft.](#)" *the peak*, May 18, 2017.

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Module 1: Our Guiding Principles

This module describes **our guiding principles** for BIT's governance, activities, and relationships. We hold these principles as core values that inform our expectations for collaboration with our partners. Our guiding principles are:

1.1 LEADING WITH DIFFERENCE

1.2 MANIFESTING ACCESS

1.3 ENACTING RADICAL RECIPROCITY

1.4 WORKING IN DECOLONIZING AND INTERSECTIONAL WAYS

In the following sections, we offer examples and practical guidance for what each of these principles might look like in practice.

*“To crip is to open up with desire
for the ways that disability
disrupts.”
- Kelly Fritsch*

1.1 Leading with Difference

Activist and disability studies scholar Kelly Fritsch writes, “to crip is to open up with desire for the ways that disability disrupts.”² Taking from Fritsch’s definition, we recognize that we benefit from leadership and collaboration with non-normatively embodied people and their disruption to how we create, exhibit, program, experience, and live with arts and culture. Likewise, desiring difference does not seek to assimilate non-normatively embodied people into mainstream culture, rather, we are excited by the creative opportunities offered by accessibility in arts and culture.

Here are some examples of how we can **lead with difference**:

Recognize the value of lived experiences as a site of critical knowledge. We encourage working with people who have lived experiences. Pay for their time and energy as we would a professional consultant.

Build a sustainable short term and long-term access budget at the start of all our projects. Avoid framing accessibility as an afterthought.

² Kelly Fritsch, “Crip Cuts: On the Boundary Work of Enacting Disability,” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Disability Studies, Denver, CO, 2012).

Change venues to places with more accessible seating and space for fat folks, wheelchair and/or other mobility device users.

Use unconventional methods to pay artists so we do not disrupt their income support. Payments can interfere with pensions or other government support. For example, some artists prefer spreading out payment in instalments rather than being paid all at once.

Centre accessibility and disabled people even when it's disruptive. Often, those of us who identify as non-normative are only welcomed in when our presence is *not* disruptive. Desire this disruption, particularly when it shapes and leads arts and culture *with difference*.

1.1.1 Disability Pride

Disability arts is an essential part of the disabled people's movement in Canada. While this broader movement fights for the legal recognition of disability rights as human rights, disability arts contributes to the advancement of social justice for disabled people by proliferating the understanding that we claim our disability as a prideful identity through which we form politics, community, and arts and culture (Abbas et al, 2004). Claiming disability as a prideful social identity disrupts the idea that disabled people are a disconnected population who are ashamed of our embodied identities. Indeed, disability politics, arts, and culture have always been disruptive. As one of our formative leaders, Catherine Frazee writes, "disabled people don't want to simply participate in Canadian culture. We want to create it, shape it, and stretch it beyond its tidy edges" (Abbas et al, 2004).

1.2 Manifesting Access



Image description: Artist Carmen Papalia, with his cane, leading a group of people across the street. Each person is filed in a line behind Papalia with their hands placed on the shoulder of the person in front of them. This title of this performance is: Blind Field Shuttle. (Heather Zinger)

In his Manifesto [Open Access](#), Disability artist Carmen Papalia describes five tenants to guide how we practice access and inclusion.³ Papalia invites us to move beyond conventional approaches such as the checklist model. Instead, to practice access, he asks us to consider the ways that disability redefines how we understand care and community. In Papalia's words, the five tenants are:

Open Access relies on those present in a particular space at a particular moment in time, their needs, and supports in relationship to each other and their communities. It involves an ongoing negotiation of trust between those who give and receive support as a mutual exchange.

Open Access is radically different from a set of policies that are enforced. It acknowledges that everyone carries a body of local knowledge and is an expert on their own access needs.

Open Access is the root system of embodied learning. It cultivates trust among those involved and enables each person to self-identify and share their experiential knowledge.

Open Access disrupts the disabling conditions that limit people's agency and potential to thrive. It reimagines "normalcy" or human experience as a continuum

³ Carmen Papalia, "[An Accessibility Manifesto for the Arts](#)," *Canadian Art*, January 2, 2018.

of embodiments, identities, realities, and learning styles. These re-imaginings operate under the principal that interdependence is central to the radical restructuring of power.

Open Access is a temporary, collectively held space where participants can find comfort in disclosing their needs and preferences with one another. It is a responsive support network that adapts as needs and available resources change.



Image description: Artist Syrus Marcus Ware performing on stage at Crippling the Arts 2016. Syrus is standing in front of a mic with a surprised expression on his face and his hands up in the air. Two people stand to his side holding large signs that read “NO”. (Syrus Marcus Ware)

1.2.1 Creating and Sustaining Communities

In 2016, the “Crippling the Arts” symposium in Toronto Ontario brought together cultural producers and d/Deaf, mad, and disabled artists to talk about Disability arts, access, and social justice. The attendees voiced an essential condition for building access: **sharing resources and developing strong communities is key to cultivating inclusive spaces.**

Here are some ways we can **manifest access** by creating and sustaining strong communities:

Share our knowledge, resources, and opportunities with a broad network of people and communities.

Develop foundational, reflective, iterative, and intersectional ways of practicing accessibility.

Support disability-identified artists through funding, programming, and professional and creative development opportunities.
Desire difference as an integral and vital part of practicing accessibility.



Image description: Wheelchair users and non-wheelchair users moving their bodies in different ways inside a gymnasium. This event was part of Flux: a movement workshop for wheelchair users hosted by the Peggy Baker Dance Projects and Tangled Art + Disability in 2015. (Peggy Baker Dance Projects)

1.3 Enacting Radical Reciprocity

Reciprocity is key to making and sustaining meaningful relationships. **Enacting reciprocity** means using transparency, honesty, respect, and wonder to foster mutual, though not necessarily equal, exchanges. It is a core value in social justice-oriented practices, among disabled people, and Indigenous nations (Inuit, First Nations, and Metis) across Turtle Island. **“Radical reciprocity”**⁴ acknowledges differences between people—in histories, in life experiences, and in social positions—which cannot be transcended or overcome. We seek to **enact reciprocity** with four overlapping groups:

Artists
Researchers

⁴ Carla Rice, Susan Dion, and Eliza Chandler, “Decolonizing Disability Arts,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* (under review).

Community organizers and activists
Organizational partners



Image description: A large horizontal banner made of cylinder beads (wampum belt) standing vertically upright on the floor of a gallery space. Entitled The 1764 Covenant Chain Wampum Belt, Lenape/Potowatomi artist Vanessa Dion Fletcher made this wampum belt using 2000 cylinder rolls of single 5 dollar bills. (Vanessa Dion Fletcher)

1.3.1 The Wampum Belt

Let us consider the Wampum Belt (see image above and image description following) to think about working reciprocally and collaboratively. Indigenous peoples use the Wampum Belt to narrate nation-to-nation relationships and it may be thought of as an exemplar of **radical reciprocity**.

A foundational example is The Two Row Wampum Belt Treaty, made between the five nations of the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch in 1613; its design recognizes and respects difference. The parallel line structure symbolizes two peoples entering a binding relationship rooted in respect, peace, and friendship across differences as they travel along separate paths. This relationship is built on non-interference, seen in the parallel lines that never touch. When settler colonizers entered into these agreements, they mistook the Wampum Beads as currency or money.

Artist Vanessa Dion Fletcher (Lenape/Potowatomi) explores this fundamental misunderstanding in her piece titled, *The 1764 Covenant Chain Wampum Belt*, after an agreement in 1764 between Sir William Johnson, representing the British, and 24 Indigenous nations at the Treaty of Niagara. Dion Fletcher recreates the agreement with a Wampum Belt made with close to 2000 five-dollar bills. She remade the Covenant Chain Wampum Belt because historians consider the Treaty of Niagara to be formative in what would become the Canadian nation. If one approaches the Wampum beads as money, then parties think they can walk away, owing each other nothing after they complete the transaction. But the Wampum Belt does not represent this kind of finite exchange. Rather, it is intended to bring people into relationship and record the nature of that relationship. In this way, Wampum represents a living agreement between different people who have agreed upon the terms of their relationship.

1.3.2 Solidarity

Working in solidarity or allyship with Indigenous, racialized, and other justice-seeking groups is critical to **enacting radical reciprocity**. Solidarity and allyship is a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized people.

The Anti-Oppression Network defines allyship as “an active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person of privilege seeks to operate in solidarity with a marginalized group of people.”⁵ Solidarity also means taking direction from the people with whom we seek to ally ourselves.

⁵ “Allyship,” The Anti-Oppression Network, last modified 2013, <http://theantioppressionnetwork.tumblr.com/allyship>

Instead of shaming or ignoring people that perpetuate power imbalances and abuses, work with them to disrupt and dismantle hierarchical values and systems.

Here are some ways we can **enact radical reciprocity** through meaningful solidarity and allyship:

Listen more and speak less: take guidance and direction from justice-seeking communities.

Learn about histories of oppression and resistance and examine how they implicate us.

Instead of shaming or ignoring people that perpetuate power imbalances and abuses, **work *with* them to disrupt and dismantle hierarchical values and systems.**

Hire a disabled person to address some of the ways that social and structural factors create barriers.

Those who self-identify with arts movements should always lead those movements. Remember the phrase “**Nothing about us without us!**”

Enacting solidarity takes energy, time, and commitment. Recognize how to move through failures of allyship and solidarity.

1.4 Working in Decolonizing and Intersectional Ways

We invite you to bring a **decolonizing and intersectional** lens into your work by learning about the connections between Indigenous sovereignty and disability justice. By doing this important work, we can recognize and account for different socio-political ways disability is produced and experienced. Many Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) people acquire their disabilities through conditions of injustices; for example, through war, immigration processes, police brutality and other form direct state violence, unsafe work conditions, poverty, food insecurity, and being forced to drink unsanitary water, and a lack of access to healthcare, just to name a few.

Some examples of how decolonizing our understandings of disability might shift our cultural practices include: using different terms in our calls for participations in addition to disability, words like sick, ill, and differently abled, for example; acknowledging that all people with disabilities might not experience their disability with provide, especially if their impairment was

caused by unjust conditions; recognizing how ableism and colonial racism are imbricated forms of oppression and working as, and with our BIPOC community members in efforts of resistances; and understanding that for our communities to feel safe and welcome in our cultural spaces, they must foreground leadership and cultural production by BIPOC people, including Elders, and our accessibility plans must include a felt commitment to decoloniality.

1.4.1 Access is Expansive

We encourage thinking broadly and politically about accessibility. Take into account experiences of ableism that intersect with racism, sexism, ageism, sizeism, queer and transphobia, settler-colonialism, and white supremacy.

We can think about **intersectional** access in multiple ways:

Cultivate art that represents experiences of ableism intersecting with racism, sexism, ageism, sizeism, queer and transphobia, settler-colonialism, and white supremacy.

Think practically about access to art making and artistic spaces for multiply marginalized people.

We must also recognize that disability and Indigeneity overlap and intersect in ways that may destabilize narratives of rights, language, and identity in Disability arts:

Disabled settlers should not have access to all spaces.

Words such as 'disabled' may not be appropriate for Indigenous peoples who are working to recuperate ideas about mind-body difference rooted in Indigenous worldviews.



*Image description: A person kneeling on a floor with their white gloved hand touching a formation of embroidered and beaded pieces of fabric organized in a grid. Each piece of fabric is cut in the shape of the upper part of a boot and arranged among cedar boughs. The title of this image is *Installing "Walking With Our Sisters"* at MSVU Art Gallery, January 2017. (Katie Nakaska)*

1.4.2 Indigenous Sovereignty

For those of us who are settlers, we must acknowledge that we live on stolen land and continually benefit from the ongoing violence of colonialism. We have a responsibility to learn from the land we are living on, be respectful of Indigenous people's power, integrate what we have learned from Indigenous peoples, and de-centre ourselves to serve Indigenous sovereignty.

At events and ceremonies across Turtle Island, it is customary for event organizers, most often settlers or non-Indigenous people, to offer land and territory acknowledgments to recognize the rights and continuing relationships of indigenous peoples and the land. However, Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill reminds us that "to be meaningful and respectful, a territorial acknowledgement needs to be intentional, and not something done by rote, to check a box."⁶ Offering a land acknowledgement does not replace the requirement to have an Elder - ideally one with whom you and your organization have developed a relationship- to open your event. Land acknowledgement should be offered with the approval of the Elder opening your event and

⁶ Dylan Robinson, Kanonhsyonne Janice C. Hill, Armand Garnet Ruffo, Selena Couture, and Lisa Cooke Ravensbergen, "Rethinking the Practice and Performance of Indigenous Land Acknowledgement," *Canadian Theatre Review* 177 (2019): 20-30.

should reflect the speaker's research about the territory on which the event is taking place and the speaker's own position within Indigenous/settler relations and their complacency in and benefit from colonial violence.

Rather than provide an example of what a land acknowledgement might look like, **we encourage you to do your own research into the covenants, treaty agreements, and Indigenous nations related to the land on which you create/work/act/gather.**

Here are some tips to support you while you do this work:

If you do not know the history of colonization in your area, consult with Indigenous people, including Indigenous-authored websites.

Refer to [this resource](#) provided by The Canadian Association of University Teachers.

We encourage you to position yourself to the traditional territory—as original peoples, Indigenous visitor, refugee, immigrant, settler, or from the intersectional position in which you live.

If appropriate, we encourage you to invite an Elder to open your events and to offer payment and other gifts of thanks.

While acknowledging territory is important, it is only a small part of cultivating strong relationships with the Indigenous Peoples on the land we currently call Canada. **Land acknowledgements should happen within larger, genuine, and ongoing work to forge real understandings and challenge the legacies of colonialism.**

Here are more ways to work with Indigenous communities towards Indigenous sovereignty:

Learn from Indigenous perspectives on madness, mental difference and healing, disability, d/Deafhood, aging, fatness, and non-normativity by regularly co-leading research and collaborating with a knowledge keeper.

Hire and work with artists at the intersections of disability and Indigeneity.

If appropriate (e.g. if you are a settler and an Elder is not present, or if an Elder asks you to), read out and enact the recommendations put forth in the Truth and Reconciliation report.

Write our MPs about the water crisis on reserves/in First Nations like Attawapiskat and other ongoing injustices.

Support and help cultivate Indigenous activism.⁷

1.4.3 Disability Justice

Disability justice is a framework for working towards disability liberation created by and for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (also abbreviated as "BIPOC"). We acknowledge Kimberlé Crenshaw and the Black feminists⁸ who created **intersectional** perspectives and

⁷ Katherena Vermette and Alicia Smith, "What Brings Us Here, Stories of Indigenous-led activism on the streets and waterways of Winnipeg, Canada," October 2 to December 7, 2016, produced by the NFB, [Instagram Video](#).

⁸ Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 139-67.

analytic tools, and the BIPOC leaders and movements who continue to fight for intersectional disability liberation.

Disability justice asks us to practice **decolonization and intersectionality** in how we experience, identify with, and develop politics around disability. While some of us identify as being disabled with pride, for others, disability may signify an experience with injustice. Others may identify as having gifts, consistent with Indigenous worldviews. We must account for these diverse ways of identifying as we design, program, and recruit for our projects.

Disability Justice reminds us to think about access as broad and systemic. Some examples include:

Washrooms need to be accessible, free, public, and all gendered.

Subways and transportation need to be accessible and affordable.

Water protectors are our leaders because clean water, air, and land are fundamental issues within our communities.

War, environmental racism, refugees and immigration, unsafe work conditions, and poverty are fundamental concerns of disability justice.

Public spaces, galleries, and restaurants need to be accessible and available to everyone.

All bodies, ages, and cultures have a right to participate in, lead, inform, and experience arts and culture programming and funding.



Image description: A person participating at CRIP INTERIORS 2015 by writing on an interior wall of "To do" by Jenna MacKay. "To do" is a large white vertical box with a side opening for visitors to enter. Inside the box, Jenna has covered the walls with yellow wallpaper with a pattern of to-do lists that record her daily living routine. (Creative Users Projects)

Module 2: Understanding Ableism

In this section, we look at how ableist understandings of disability create structural, environmental, and attitudinal barriers. **Ableism** prevents people from being able to participate—fully and equally—in culture. It is important to recognize how our society defines and understands disability, both historically and culturally. We also look at language, and its power to shape perceptions of disability.

This module is developed from excerpts extracted from the [Accessibility Toolkit](#)⁹ produced in partnership with Tangled Art + Disability, Creative Users Projects, and Humber College.

Module 2: Contents

2.1 HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND DISABILITY?

2.1.1 THE MEDICAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

2.1.2 THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

2.2 LANGUAGE

2.2.1 BUT WHAT WORDS AND PHRASES DO WE USE?

2.1 How do we Understand Disability?

2.1.1 The Medical Model of Disability

The medical model suggests impairments or differences should be ‘fixed’ or changed by treatment. **This model focuses on what is ‘wrong’ with the individual rather than what they need for access, inclusion, and justice.**

The medical model frames access as an individual concern, not a social one. For example, if a wheelchair user cannot enter a building because of steps, the medical model suggests the issue is the wheelchair and the wheelchair user’s impairment rather than the steps. If a person living with chronic illness or episodic disability cannot sit at a desk for 35 hours a week, the medical model suggests that they need to adapt to the demands of the job rather than use an alternative work model.

When policy makers and managers think about disability in individualistic ways they tend to either leave people out or try to compensate people for what is ‘wrong’ with their bodies. For example, they may offer ‘special’ benefits and provide ‘special’ segregated services.

2.1.2 The Social Model of Disability

The social model, in contrast to the medical model, **frames disability as a social construct created by access barriers in the environment** rather than a medical ‘problem’ in the body. In

⁹ Anne Zbitnew, [The Accessibility Toolkit: A guide to making arts spaces accessible](#), in consultation with Kim Fullerton, Lenore McMillan, and Fran Odette, designed by Jennie Grimard (Toronto, ON: Humber College and Tangled Art + Disability, 2018).

practice, it identifies processes of exclusion and seeks to remove systemic and cultural barriers. Developed by disabled people to identify and respond to rights-based discrimination, the social model suggests that barriers in society disable individuals.

Using the example of the wheelchair user who cannot enter a building due to steps, the social model perceives the steps as barriers, and not the wheelchair or disabled person. For the person living with chronic illness or an episodic disability, the conventional work week is the disabling barrier--not their bodies or minds.

For more information, [here is a wonderful 3-minute film made by Scope](#), a disability equality charity in the UK.¹⁰ In the film, Scope poses the following questions to prominent disabled people living in the UK: What is the social model of disability? Why is it important to you?

2.2 Language

Language shapes how people view Disability arts and disability-identified artists. If used carelessly, **language can perpetuate ableist perceptions and representations of disability**. People outside of the disability community, and/or without access to preferred language information, can mistakenly fall back on incorrect and troubling language when talking about disability and Disability arts.

As someone working with(in) disability community, here are a few ways you can impact the conversation around disability and accessibility:

- Work closely with public relations professionals, journalists, and reviewers to ensure they use respectful terminology.

- Put disabled people's preferred language into your organization's communications to model an understanding of disability and Disability arts.

- Create guidelines and a glossary of terms and definitions for your website and/or your organization members.

2.2.1 But What Words and Phrases do we Use?

Not everyone will agree on terms or phrases. There can be no 'one size fits all' approach because language is always changing. At a minimum, disabled people expect that the words and images you use do not stigmatize or reinforce outdated stereotypes. It is important to remember that self-identification is key.

When you are talking to or about someone, **ask them how they identify or how they would like to be referred to**. Importantly, this practice may be the most respectful and effective way to talk about a person and/or their art.

When addressing and describing disability:

- Respect the person.

- Do not describe people as "suffering from," "victims of," "afflicted by," or "overcoming" their disabilities.

- Do not portray disabled people as heroic overachievers or long-suffering saints.

¹⁰ Scope, ["What is the Social Model of Disability,"](#) YouTube Video, August 21, 2014.

Do not equate disability with illness or disease.
Do not assume that disabled people have special needs or requests.
Incorporate accessibility that welcomes us into art galleries, museums,
performances, and other arts spaces.
Move against accommodation culture and towards meaningful accessibility.

Module 3: Access in Practice

This module introduces **practical ways to enact accessibility**. First, we describe how to identify barriers in your event, space, and organization. Next, we discuss different considerations and accommodations for welcoming difference and disability. We then provide resources to help you adopt and create accessible curatorial practices in exhibition spaces, performances, and film festivals.

When we think about accessibility, it is important to not treat these practices as fixed solutions. Instead, accessibility is an iterative practice, building on past learnings and collaborative efforts with our communities.

Much of what we present here reflects collective knowledge from [Tangled Art + Disability](#), the [Humber Accessibility Toolkit](#),¹¹ and the [Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessibility](#).¹² When we work together to make arts accessible, we produce new and innovative ways of creating and experiencing art, as this module shows.

Module 3: Contents

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3.3 CONSIDERATIONS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

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Resources on Plain Language

3.3.4d Design Principles

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¹¹ Anne Zbitnew, *The Accessibility Toolkit*.

¹² [“Access Smithsonian,”](#) Smithsonian, July, 2019.

- 3.3.9** SCENT-FREE SPACE
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3.1 Identifying Barriers

Identifying barriers means listening, learning, educating, and experimenting in collaboration with everyone in your organization.

Barriers are circumstances or obstacles that keep people from fully participating in events, organizations, systems, and society at large. Barriers can include limitations in programming, social ideas and systems, organizational structures, spatial arrangements, communication, transportation, and policies.

We encourage you to think broadly about access. To begin this process, here are four tips for identifying barriers:

Recognize that identifying barriers means listening, learning, educating, and experimenting in collaboration with everyone in your organization.

Staff, members, and visitors are valuable contributors to supporting your organization's accessibility.

Provide safe and accessible ways for your guests or communities to offer their feedback. Page has more information on feedback.

Designate somebody from your staff or project to take on the role of access manager. Access managers focus on the development of inclusive practices in your work environment and activities.

Do an environmental audit with a consultant from the disability community to identify structural and physical barriers in your organization. This consultant can also help to develop a strategic timeline that outlines when and how these barriers can be removed. Some factors to consider include:

Washroom accessibility for wheelchair users

Wayfinding

Width of doorways and hallways

Accessible entry to your building

Locating nearest accessible transit station

Adjustable lighting for those who might be prone to sensory overload

3.2 Create an Access Work Plan

After identifying barriers, it may be helpful to create an Access Work Plan. This way, you can organize your access plans for current and future events by **creating a spreadsheet of all your accessibility goals**. You can fill this document out while you read through the specific access points in the next section. For each goal, include columns for both short- and long-term plans based on what you can do today and what you can work towards in the future. Start researching long-term strategies for any 'hard to reach' goals.

3.3 Considerations and Accommodations

This section lists **specific details to consider and accommodations to make for disability** during event planning. Consult this section when organizing public programming/events, openings, launches, exhibitions, performances, conferences, and other related events.

This information can also help you communicate precisely what you can and cannot offer to your guests. Try to place access information so that it is easy to find, whether on your website and/or in an access guide. Page has more information access guides.

3.3.1 Booking Your Venue

Before you plan for your event, an important first task is to **secure a space that is as barrier-free as possible**.

There are many features that make a room barrier-free. Working with an understanding of the access needs of your event's participants can be helpful in determining what you need from a barrier-free venue. Below is a list of things to ask yourself when visiting a potential venue.

Is the room wheelchair accessible? There should be no steps going into the building or into the room itself. The doorway into the room should be at least 32 inches wide for power chairs and scooters.

Is there an automatic button for wheelchair users to open the door with? Most buildings do not include this feature. If your space has doors that some people cannot open, consider having volunteers stationed at these doors.

What is the capacity of the room? Divide the stated capacity of the room in half. For example, if the capacity of the room is 200, we recommend that you change that number to 100. This halved capacity will ensure you have the space required for wheelchair and scooter users.

Does the room have AV equipment? Having AV equipment is helpful for live captioning (page) and live streaming (page) for d/Deaf and hard of hearing participants.

It is important to visit potential venues. If possible, consult with a wheelchair user and contract them to do an accessibility audit of the space with you. Unfortunately, getting information over the phone or online may not always be accurate. The organization may not have a full understanding of barriers and accessibility. When booking your space, also consider seating, layout, and lighting, detailed in the next two sections.

3.3.2 Seating and Layout

Consider the shape and layout of the room. Keep in mind the different kinds of bodies using and moving through the space.

If you can, select a room with movable furniture. Spaces with fixed seating, like many theatre venues, limit the capacity of attendees. Fixed seating and furniture also limit the ability of wheelchair and mobility device users to navigate the space with ease and make choices about where they want to sit.

When planning the layout of the room for your event, make sure that there are wide, open pathways for wheelchair users to move through and sit in. Have volunteers monitor these pathways and spaces to ensure that they remain clear. Tables and chairs get moved around, bags and coats get placed on the floor, service and companion animals get settled, and assistive devices need space.

Have spaces for wheelchair users, people with service animals, and people with assistive devices throughout different parts of the room. People should be able to choose where to sit and not be relegated to the back of the room.

If possible, have a variety of seating options. These options could include mats for sitting or lying on the floor and chairs with and without arms.

Be sure to have dedicated ASL seating with signage and clear sight lines for interpreters and d/Deaf audience members.

If you plan to have standing room in the space, provide chairs for people who need and want to sit. Arrange these chairs and ASL seating in front of the standing area.

3.3.2a Signage and Wayfinding

Here are a few tips for accessible Wayfinding and Signage:

Have clear signs written in Plain Language. Page has more information on Plain Language.

Display signs at wheelchair height.

Install bright colored tape and tactile floor indicators at the top and bottom of stairs for blind or partially sighted visitors.

Display a sign with information about accessible supports and locations of accessible facilities.

3.3.3 Lighting

Try to find a venue where you can control the lighting and/or have windows with curtains. Lighting is important, particularly for people with environmental sensitivities and needs. For some people, flickering or strobe lights can trigger anxiety or seizures. Fluorescent or artificial lights can be hard on people's eyes, even causing headaches and migraines.

3.3.4 Marketing and Outreach

Connecting with people before your event helps foster strong relationships built on trust and inclusive principles.

3.3.4a Communication and Information

Often venues say that they are accessible but do not specify how and to whom. Here are some tips to help communicate accessibility:

In general:

Communicate in appropriate ways and with culturally relevant content.

Think about the community you are reaching out to and what information applies to their experiences of arts and culture. You can also hire consultants from different disabled communities to help design marketing content. For a great example, please refer to [this Luminato Theatre promo video](#) to the d/Deaf community.¹³

Use appropriate language when talking about disability. Page has more information on language.

Highlight special performances and access info on all marketing materials.

Put a clear accessibility statement on your website about your organization's commitments and activities. Page has more information on website accessibility.

¹³ Luminato Festival, "[Deaf & ASL Accessibility | Luminato 2017](#)," YouTube Video, June 13, 2017.

Provide multiple ways to get in contact. People may want to communicate over email, telephone, TTY, online forms, or social media.

Establish a mailing list for people who want up-to-date information about accessible programming. Page has more information on newsletter accessibility.

Use accessible Plain Language. Try to avoid jargon and use short sentences and simple common words. Page has more information on plain language.

Before an event:

Give people access information in the form of a Visual Story or Access Guide. Try to have an access guide available as soon as possible. Many disabled people need time and information to prepare for an event. Please refer to the Creative Users [Crippling the Arts Access Guide](#)¹⁴ and the Access Guide section on page for more information.

Gather as much information as possible about participants' access needs as early as you can. Then, you can make access arrangements and tell people what supports will and will not be available.

Create a short fact sheet or brochure of accessibility features with a map of the facility. Have this sheet available at your event.

If possible, share information about your event in **large print, ASL interpretation, and audio formats.** For example, have a video recording (vlog) produced by a d/Deaf interpreter transcribing your press release. Page has more information on creating vlogs.

During and after an event:

Provide content warnings at events that contain disturbing content or may trigger sensory overload. You can also share content warnings during promotion in the form of a visual story. Please see the [Crippling the Arts Access Guide](#) for an example.

Provide safe and accessible ways for your guests to easily offer their feedback. Page has more information on feedback.

3.3.4b Outreach

Given the history of marketing material not being accessible, not including access info, or arts events not being accessible, disabled people may not be in the habit of engaging with marketing and outreach materials or activities. Consider unconventional ways to reach people. Form an access advisory team to focus on these strategies. **Be proactive and do not wait for people with disabilities to seek out the organization.**

Here are some ways to connect with disability communities:

Show up, support, and be a visible presence in disability communities.

¹⁴ Creative Users Projects, [Crippling the Arts Access Guide](#), January, 2019.

Network to form genuine relationships and partnerships with disability-led organizations. Invite the organization's staff to speak at meetings, conferences and events.

Set up booths and displays at disability events, community spaces, and organizations.

Invite communities to your venue before events. Organize touch tours (page) and walking tours to let people visit the venue and familiarize themselves with the space. You can also use this opportunity to get feedback on your event.

Create mail and e-mail lists of local service agencies, organizations, and social clubs by and for people with disabilities. Also reach out to social service workers, recreation therapists, care workers, schools/educators, and parents.

Learn from feedback and the concerns that people bring to your attention. It is ok to say you do not know the answer, but always be ready to figure things out. Do not make promises you cannot keep.

Use outreach tools that share accessible events with communities. A few examples include [Creative Users Projects](#), [AVA/AccessTO](#), and the [Tangled Art + Disability](#) newsletter.

3.3.4c Plain Language

Not everybody shares the same knowledge and experiences. So try to **do your best to use clear and simple language**. Welcome any questions on the language being used.

If you are unsure about the legibility of your communication, consult the people you are trying to communicate with. Ask someone to review its vocabulary, structure, and design for clarity. If you can, hire a consultant and pay for their time.

Resources on Plain Language

[The Plain Language Network](#)

[United States Government's Plain Language reference](#)

3.3.4d Design Principles

Text and document design are important for clear communication. Keep and update a visual style guide for your organization's print and digital publications that meets accessibility standards.

Basic accessible design principles:

Font: at least 12 pt., avoid extremes in between-letter spacing, line weight, and width.

High contrast: aim for 70% contrast text/background.

Images: avoid text on images, keep contrast in mind.

Access Info: with limited space use accessibility icons and provide your contact info and/or a link to online accessibility information.

Make alternate formats available: Large print, braille, digital versions, tagged PDFs.

Resources for accessible design

[RGD Accessible Design](#)

[CNIB: Clear Print Design Standard](#)

[Accessing the Arts Icon Set](#)

[Algonquin College Video Accessibility Tutorials: Creating Accessible Documents](#)

3.2.4e Website Accessibility

Make sure your website is **compliant** with the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG 2.1).

Validate your website using an online validation tool such as [validator.w3.org](#).

Services like the [Inclusive Design Research Centre](#) at OCAD University will provide an **accessibility audit** of websites.

Content management systems (like WordPress, Drupal, Joomla, etc.) often have accessibility built-in but themes and other content may create inaccessible elements.

3.3.4f Newsletter Accessibility

Give subscribers the option of **HTML or plain text**.

Use **descriptive subject lines** and headers.

A Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system can get complicated.

A CRM is a technology for managing all your company's interactions with customers and potential customers. Make sure the CRM has accessible HTML, linked web resources, and other features.

3.3.4g Social Media Accessibility

Use #CamelCase for hashtags. CamelCase capitalizes separate words in a hashtag, i.e. #AudioDescription or #RelaxedPerformance.

Include contact info on all social media profiles.

Enable image descriptions on Twitter. To learn how, please [read this article](#).

Describe links from twitter and link to accessible content when possible.

Enable closed-captions on YouTube. For better accuracy, you can upload your own transcripts.

Describe images and videos on Instagram. Include transcripts for videos in the image description. Page has information on image description and Page has information on described videos.

On Facebook, add descriptive captions to images. Consider uploading videos to YouTube with captioning rather than uploading them to Facebook directly.

Resources for social media

[United States Government's Social Media Accessibility Toolkit Hackpad](#)

3.3.4h Accessible Feedback

Access is a collaborative process with our communities. Therefore, it is important to **gather and reflect on feedback from your participants**. Here are few things to keep in mind when developing feedback systems:

Provide a variety of ways for people to give feedback. People may prefer to communicate via phone, TTY, email, website form, or online survey. Consider having opportunities at your venue for people to write comments, record video/audio reactions, and offer direct feedback to staff.

Inform people of your feedback options.

Follow up with visitors who have attended assisted performances.

Make any feedback feature easy to find and use on your website. For example, the National Arts Centre (NAC) has [a feedback form](#) on their accessibility page.

Have a plan for how to respond to feedback.

Follow up in a reasonable amount of time. Thank the individual, acknowledge the specific comment, avoid using general responses, and tell them what you plan to do.

Integrate feedback into your marketing strategy.

Regularly inform your communities about any changes from feedback using accessible formats, such as a vlog with ASL interpretation. Page has more information on vlogs.

If you use online surveys:

Make sure all forms are accessible. Ensure that people who use screen readers or assistive communication devices can read and use the forms. Put labels before form fields instead of after. Use [the WebAIM site](#) for tips on making your forms accessible.

Make sure all forms are clear and logical. Provide clear instructions in Plain Language. Page has more information on Plain Language.

Use popular, accessible survey tools (ex. SurveyMonkey and SurveyGizmo). These tools often have accessibility features built in.

Avoid introducing inaccessible elements, like text as images and/or images without alt text. Page has more information on accessible design principles.

3.3.5 Conflicting Access Needs

Sometimes you may receive accommodation requests that conflict with each other. For example, one person may require that the lights are low because of a sensory sensitivity, while another person may require that the lights are bright because they have low vision. We encourage you to **work with the people making the requests**. Be honest about the conflict and collaborate on a solution that attends to both of their needs. Communication, honesty, and openness is integral to building trust and confidence within disability communities and a collaborative response gives value to different experiences and perspectives. Keep in mind that it is not always possible to meet everybody's needs and requests.



Image description: Two people simultaneously applying lip balm to each other's lips as part of the performance, Deathnastics, presented at Bunker 2 Contemporary Art Container (<http://creativeusers.net/events/deathnastics/>). Collaborating artists: Eliza Chandler, Kim Collins, Lindsay Fisher, Esther Ignagni, Deirdre Logue, Allyson Mitchell, Vanessa Dion Fletcher, Sean Lee, and Carrie Perreault. (Creative Users Projects)

3.3.6 Support Persons

A disabled person, or your organization, hires or chooses a support person to provide services and/or assistance. Consider having support persons at your events as attendants and/or active listeners. Some people may want to bring their own support person and/or personal support worker (PSW).

Attendants can open inaccessible doors and escort visitors to elevators and accessible washrooms on request. Specially trained attendants are skilled in verbal description, physically guiding blind and low-vision visitors, assisting people in and to the washroom, and interacting respectfully with persons with disabilities. On-site attendants should be available at events to assist those who need it. For liability purposes, staff or volunteers should not attempt to transfer wheelchairs or people.

Participants having concerns or feelings about your event can approach **Active listeners**. Active listeners can listen and provide dedicated support, space to debrief, and information about resources.¹⁵

3.3.7 Live Streaming

Live streaming is a great way to provide access to people who cannot leave their home or be at your venue. It is also an effective way to document and archive your events, and you can share recordings and use them for promotion.

Live streaming your events usually requires renting equipment and hiring a team of technicians to set up and manage filming. To save costs and share resources, arts organizations can work together by collectively investing in technologies and training.

3.3.8 Spare Wheelchairs

Have spare wheelchairs if you are hosting an event where people will be asked to walk or move to different locations. By renting extra wheelchairs, people who cannot walk for long periods of time will still be able to move around the space.

3.3.9 Scent-free Space

Galleries, offices, and other event spaces should aim to be scent-free. Organizers can request that anyone working in or visiting the space refrain from wearing scents. People should avoid perfumes, colognes, heavily scented body products, laundry detergents, and contact with incense, cigarettes, or other things that create smoke. You can ask people to not wear scents on all your promotional and communication materials leading up to the event.

3.3.10 Admission Fees

Events should try to charge affordable admissions fees or free entry. If there are admission fees, attendants for disabled participants should receive free admission. We also recommend community pricing and/or sliding scales for low-income individuals.

3.3.11 Access Guide

After you organize the event, the next step is to **provide an access guide as early as you can.** An access guide allows people to mentally and physically prepare for your event and make their own personalized access arrangements.

¹⁵ "Active Listening for Events," Dalhousie Student Union, Accessed December 10, 2019, <http://dsu.ca/survivorsupport>

One effective access guide format is a visual document with images, Plain Language descriptions, and maps. This document clearly shows what will happen at the event, the access arrangements, how the space is accessible or not accessible, who will be at the event, and details on the location and space itself.

The more information you can provide about the event, the more useful the guide can be.

3.3.11a Key Considerations

Create a main access guide for your space available to potential guests and attendees in a hard copy format and as a screen readable pdf on your website.

Create specific access guides for each program and event.

Visitors should be able to request a different reading format by contacting your organization.

3.3.11b How to Put Together an Access Guide

When planning your event, **start this guide as early as possible**. Preparing early will give you time to gather images, maps, bios, and travel information. Consider the following ideas when creating your access guide:

Introduce your event by giving a brief summary without using suggestive language. Describe concrete aspects of the event and not what you think people will feel. For example, avoid sentences like, “You’ll have a great time at our event!” Instead, describe what will happen, when, where, and how.

Identify who will perform at, facilitate, and/or host the event. Provide images and bios.

Describe what will happen at the event. Provide an agenda with descriptions about each activity. Also, explain the format of activities and what you will ask people to do. For example, let people know if you will ask participants to get into groups or change seating.

Highlight the event’s accessibility. Provide a breakdown of all access features, accommodations, and arrangements. You can also use this section to explain any access needs that you could not accommodate and why. However, do not name specific people’s needs. Remember that we should frame access needs as beneficial to the whole group and not just to one person.

Suggest ways for people to make the space as safe and inclusive as possible. Provide a list of tips to help participants create a safe and inclusive experience for everyone. People sometimes call these commitments.

Tell people where the event is and how to get to the space. Include an image of the building’s exterior with its address. We also recommend providing a visual map of the area with accessible entrances. Describe any entrances with text and images; say how many steps it takes to get to the front door and whether there is a ramp.

Identify who will be at the event. This information can be broad, i.e. “This event is for anyone who is interested in education, so we expect there to be many different people there including teachers, students, academics, and the general public.” Or, it can be specific. For example, if you are having an invitation-only gathering, try to provide an image and bio of everyone attending, including support workers if possible.

For an example of an access guide please see the [Crippling the Arts Access Guide](#).¹⁶

3.4 Exhibition and Curatorial Practices

This section details specific access points for exhibition and curatorial practices.

We adapted these practices from the [Accessibility Toolkit](#)¹⁷ and the [Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessibility](#).¹⁸



Image Description: This photo shows a series of black and white prints hanging in a gallery wall created by artist Cecil Day. There are two linocut blocks displayed on tables in front of the prints which were made available to visitors to be touched. MSVU Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2017. (MSVU Gallery)

Whenever possible, **the gallery and artist should work together** to design an exhibit that is accessible to as many people as possible. Collaborative curation is important for many disabled and otherwise marginalized artists so that they can influence the presentation of their work.

3.4.1 Exhibition Content

Practicing accessible curation starts with the content that we choose to display.

¹⁶ Creative Users Projects, *Crippling the Arts Access Guide*.

¹⁷ Anne Zbitnew, *The Accessibility Toolkit*.

¹⁸ “Access Smithsonian.”

Try to curate content so that the exhibit is approachable to people with different levels of art and subject knowledge.

Present content that people can experience through different senses, i.e. sight, hearing, and touch. For an example, learn about vibrotactile arts on page .

Include pieces for people to touch. If people cannot touch any artwork, offer comprehensive audio description. Page has information on touch tours and Page has information about audio description.

3.4.2 Labeling, Hanging, and Displaying Content

Display and label art so that everyone can experience it.

Essential information on labels should be legible (at least 14 pt.) and all text should follow accessible design principles. Page has more information about design principles.

Labels should be available in Braille or audio for those who cannot read print.

There should be clear, barrier-free pathways throughout the space. For example, there should be 1.5 meters of navigation space between objects.

To ensure accessibility, content should be no more than 42” from the floor, including all artwork, signs, labels, and display surfaces.

3.4.3 Audiovisuals and Interactives

Keep accessibility in mind when exhibiting audiovisuals and interactives.

All audio, including interactives, lyrics, speech, and soundtracks, should be open or closed caption.

Identify and describe ambient elements on labels.

Identify and label interactives and audiovisuals that do not have soundtracks, particularly for d/Deaf and hard of hearing people.

Audio describe audiovisual programs and interactives that present information with images and print. Page has more information on audio description.

Interactive instructions should be available in accessible formats, such as audio described, large print, and/or ASL interpreted.

Make sure that everyone can operate interactives and place controls in accessible locations without obstacles.

3.4.4 Colour

For some neurodiverse people or people with sensory sensitivities, certain colours and their combinations can be uncomfortable.

Consult with artists and folks from the neurodiverse community about appropriate colours that create an environment that is comfortable, safe, and less likely to cause sensory overload.

Provide a 'heads up' in your access guide and at the gallery entrance if the exhibit has colours that may trigger people with sensitivities.

3.4.5 Lighting

Adjust lighting for people's visual needs and so that people with low vision can view and safely navigate your exhibit.

Light content and labels so that they are visible to people with low vision. Make exceptions for objects that bright lights would damage.

Try to eliminate glare from cases and labels for people who are seated and standing.

Light your space to support speech reading and sign language conversation.

3.4.6 Relaxed Hours

Relaxed hours are a period of time where you remove or soften any flashing lights, bright lights, or loud sounds.

Try to provide relaxed hours for every exhibition. Page 44 has more information on relaxed performances.

Have a quiet room or 'Chill Out' space.

3.5 Theatre and Performance Arts

Producers, front of house staff, organizers, and artists/performers can work together to facilitate an inclusive environment.



Image Description: This is a still image from the official music video for Gaelynn Lea's original song, "Lost in the Woods." This image shows Gaelynn Lea sitting in a power chair and facing the camera. Gaelynn is wearing a pink wig and halter top and seems to be tangled up in strands of yarn. (Gaelynn Lea)

3.5.1 Seating

Review accessible seating and layout practices on page. Many performance spaces have fixed seating and require special consideration.

Have additional seating with arm and back support if benches are being used for seating.

Have multiple aisle seats with swing-away armrests, removable armrests, or no armrests. Try to have these seats throughout the space and identify them with a wheelchair access symbol. Notify patrons about these chairs at the entrance with accessible signage. Page has more information on signage.

Areas for performers must be accessible, such as stages and dressing rooms.

If the programming space is dark, use assistive devices to create a visible route throughout the space. Some examples include handrails, strip lighting, and brightly coloured tape.

Use visually accessible seating colour and materials, such as signs that indicate accessible seating.

3.5.2 d/Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Blind, and Low-Vision Access

Read through Modules 4 and 5 for detailed access information for d/Deaf, hard of hearing, blind, and low-vision communities.

Provide ASL interpretation (page) for d/Deaf people and Audio Description (page) for blind and low-vision people.

Provide captioning for all video/film screenings. Page 55 has more information on captioning.

Provide assistive listening systems in all public programming spaces. Page has more information assistive listening devices.

3.5.3 Relaxed Performance

Relaxed performances are designed to make theatre spaces more comfortable and welcoming to audience members with autism spectrum disorders, sensory and communication disorders, or learning disabilities. Other audience members who benefit from relaxed performances include people with toddlers, people with Tourette's syndrome, people with chronic illness who need access to washrooms, people who experience anxiety, and people who do not enjoy traditional theatre settings.

Below is an overview of relaxed performance practices.

3.5.3a Organization

When conducting an environmental audit of your space, identify elements that may trigger sensory overload such as bright lighting, loud noises, unclear signage, and strong smells. Consult with people who need or prefer relaxed performances.

Have policies and staff training for relaxed performances. Train your staff around different types of communication and imagination. Train your marketing team on how to create content for relaxed performance audiences.

Create accessible box office ticketing policies. Please refer to the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\) guidelines around ticketing](#).

3.5.3b Performance Adjustments

Train staff or hire a consultant to do a performance audit to identify elements with a risk of sensory overload. Here is a list of typical adjustments for relaxed performance:

Doors remain open to the lobby/foyer.

Audience lighting stays on, though often slightly dimmed.

Slow and/or less intense lighting effects.

Slightly lower sounds and sound effects.

Reconsider visual effects and/or communicate them to audiences before the production.

Audiences can interact with props with high stimuli associations before the production. For example, fake guns can be placed in the lobby to be explained, seen, and touched before a performance.

Adjust surprising and high intensity actions. These events may include entrances, exits, violence, sexuality, and explosions.

Reduce screaming or shouting in volume, intensity, or length.

After production, **the actors return to the stage to say goodbye as themselves** and not as their characters.

3.5.3c Before a Performance

Create a visual story or access guide for each performance. Section 3.5.3 has more information on access guides.

Open your venue to the public for familiarization visits. Let your audience come see the space and get more information from the staff about the performance.

Highlight relaxed performances in your marketing and outreach. Page has more information on marketing and outreach.

Partner with other organizations that are using relaxed performances. Collaborate with each other, share information, knowledge, and community feedback.

Publish a short video recording of the performance and your space on your website.

3.5.3d At the Show

Prepare staff and artists to welcome diverse audiences.

Create a ‘Chill Out’ space near or in your lobby for people who need to take a break from the performance.

Have a pre-performance introduction to relaxed performances and explain the performance’s relaxed features.

Have opportunities and space for people to give feedback. Page has more information on feedback.

3.6 Film Festivals

On May 27, 2019, representatives from Reel Abilities, Inside Out, Tangled Arts + Disability, Bodies in Translation, Creative Users Projects, Hot Docs, and the arts community across Ontario came together for a discovery forum to address issues of accessibility in the Toronto-area film festivals. **Below is a list of 10 tips for better film festival accessibility.**



Image Description: This is a screen shot of an Instagram post taken at the Reel Access event. People sit in rows of chairs facing the front room where three speakers sit in a line at a table. On the left of the room on the wall is a large poster that says Inside Out with rainbow graphics. On the right of the image is some text posted by creativeusers.art: “Real tips at #ReelAccess Thanks to @insideoutfestival @reelabilities and @hotdocs for bringing us together to talk about accessibility in the film sector! #ImageDescription A large room with people seated towards the front listening to a row of panelists on a stage.” Reelabilitiesto also posted: “Thank you!” (Creative Users Projects)

3.6.1 Checklist of Basic Essentials for Film Festival Accessibility

Captioning: At least 25% of films shown at the festival should have captioning for d/Deaf/hard of hearing individuals either through a device such as CaptiView or on the screen. Section 4.5 has more information on captioning.

Audio Description: At least 25% of films shown at the festival should use audio description for blind and low-vision people. Page has more information on audio description.

Support Persons: Recognize support persons for the assistance they provide. Give them free entry and make this policy public. Page has more information on support persons.

Wheelchair Accessibility: All venues need to be wheelchair accessible including bathroom(s) for all genders, the ticket pick-up area, concession, and the theatre itself. People who use wheelchairs need to have a reasonable choice of seating locations with adequate companion seating nearby. They should be

able to access the main presentation stage. Wheelchair accessibility needs to be a requirement for all related party and event venues.

Autism-Friendly and Relaxed Screenings: Provide relaxed and/or autism-friendly screenings for at least 25% of the films. Festivals, parties, and events should have a 'Chill Out' space for people who need to take a break. Page has more information on relaxed spaces.

Representation: Have fair representation of disabled people in the festival's artists, volunteers, staff, and management, possibly through consultation or the creation of an advisory group. Disabled artists and consultants may require financial incentives, assistance to submit work, and specific mentorship opportunities.

Ticket Sales: At least one ticket-purchasing method needs to be accessible for d/Deaf/hard of hearing individuals. In addition, at least one ticket-purchasing method needs to be accessible for blind/low-vision individuals. It must be easy to get a complimentary ticket for a support person via all purchasing processes. Please refer to the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\) guidelines around ticketing](#).

Website Accessibility: The festival's website must be accessible with contact information for an Accessibility Coordinator in an easily found location. Page has more information on website accessibility.

Program Guide Accessibility: Program guides must be accessible or an accessible version needs to be available upon request. They must be available online, compatible with screen/Braille readers, and follow accessible design principles (page). Programs should feature accessibility information, including all elements on this checklist. Page has information on access guides.

Accountability: Communicate all accessibility information clearly, accessibly, and thoroughly. Page has more information on marketing and outreach, including how to communicate access information to disabled communities. Accountability also includes accessible feedback available to all participants. Section 3.3.4h has more information on accessible feedback systems.

Module 4: d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing Culture in the Arts

In this module, we focus specifically on d/Deaf and hard of hearing culture in the arts. We summarize current d/Deaf cultural practices and describe the accommodation and communication needs of people who identify as d/Deaf or hard of hearing.

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4.1 A Note on d/Deaf

The word *Deaf* written with a capitalized 'D' signifies Deaf culture and people who identify as Deaf.¹⁹ In this guide, we use the phrase 'd/Deaf' to denote that some, but not all, of d/Deaf and hard of hearing folks identify as Deaf, a linguistic minority and culture with its own history, language, humour, and cultural practices.

¹⁹ see Kristin Snodden, *Telling Deaf Lives: Agents of Change* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2014).



Image Description: A photo of Sage Willow performing in ASL as a museum guide for Gems and Minerals, a project by artist Diane Borsato. In this work, museum guides discuss the hidden worlds of rock and mineral specimens in the Teck Suite: Earth's Treasures galleries at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. (Diane Borsato)

4.2 Interpretation

You should always include ASL (American Sign Language) or LSQ (Langue des signes du Québec) interpretation in your budget and at all public arts and cultural events. **Providing interpreters helps to ensure that d/Deaf people can access events, even if there was no formal request for the service.** Accessibility is about creating inviting spaces where people do not need to request inclusion. Importantly, make sure you get the word out to d/Deaf communities about your ASL-interpreted event! Page has more information on marketing and outreach.

4.2.1 Hearing and d/Deaf Interpreters

Hearing interpreters use sign language and spoken language to provide clear two-way communication between d/Deaf and hearing people.

d/Deaf interpreters are themselves d/Deaf with fluency in ASL and/or LSQ interpretation. A d/Deaf interpreter works with a hearing interpreter to facilitate communication between deaf people and hearing people.

A hearing and d/Deaf interpreter team is recommended when a d/Deaf person uses signs particular to a region or age group, has minimal or limited communication skills, uses non-standard ASL or gestures, or is more comfortable communicating through someone with a shared culture and life experience. For scripted events, such as plays, films, musical performances, or speeches, a team will also provide higher quality interpretation.

4.2.1a How Hearing and d/Deaf Interpreters Work Together

The d/Deaf and hearing interpreters may consult each other to find the best interpretation. For example, sometimes hearing interpreters will pause speakers to ensure clarity while communicating with the d/Deaf interpreter.²⁰

Here is an example of how these interpreters work together:

A hearing person communicates in spoken English.

The hearing interpreter interprets the spoken English to ASL.

The d/Deaf interpreter then translates what the hearing interpreter says. They might use a combination of ASL, sign, gesture, or other communication strategies to convey the message to the d/Deaf person.

The d/Deaf person communicates.

The d/Deaf interpreter will interpret the d/Deaf person's communication into ASL.

The hearing interpreter then interprets from ASL into spoken English.

The process looks like this:

Hearing Person → Hearing Interpreter → d/Deaf Interpreter → d/Deaf Person

d/Deaf Person → d/Deaf Interpreter → Hearing Interpreter → Hearing Person

4.3 Cultural Practice

When working with d/Deaf artists and/or engaging with d/Deaf communities, **remember that ASL is not universal**. It is important to consider the cultural backgrounds of interpreters and d/Deaf people because there are different forms and nuances of sign language between cultures.

The structure of ASL is radically different to spoken language. Where spoken language moves from details/discussion to point, sign language focuses on the direct point of a sentence followed by the discussion. When possible, **communicate with interpreters about language before an event**. Share speakers' texts (conference papers, scripts, or speaking presentations) to help interpreters familiarize themselves and ask any questions on the language being used.

4.3.1 Hiring

4.3.1a d/Deaf Interpreters

To help cultivate representation of d/Deaf culture and aesthetics in the arts, **hire d/Deaf interpreting services whenever there is a script**, i.e. in performances, plays, and speeches. Working with d/Deaf interpreters for whom sign language is their first language results in better translation and greater support for d/Deaf culture.

4.3.1b Representation

²⁰ ["About Deaf Interpreting."](#) CHS.

Think about who the interpreter is representing. **Hire interpreters who culturally represent the speaker or theme of the event for which they will be interpreting.** For example, if you are hiring interpreters for a performance where the leading acts are Indigenous, then try to hire Indigenous interpreters. Below is an example of a vlog that Deaf Spectrum produced²¹ for a screening event called “State Violence and Indigenous Resistance” See the event page [here](#), and view the ASL vlog [here](#).

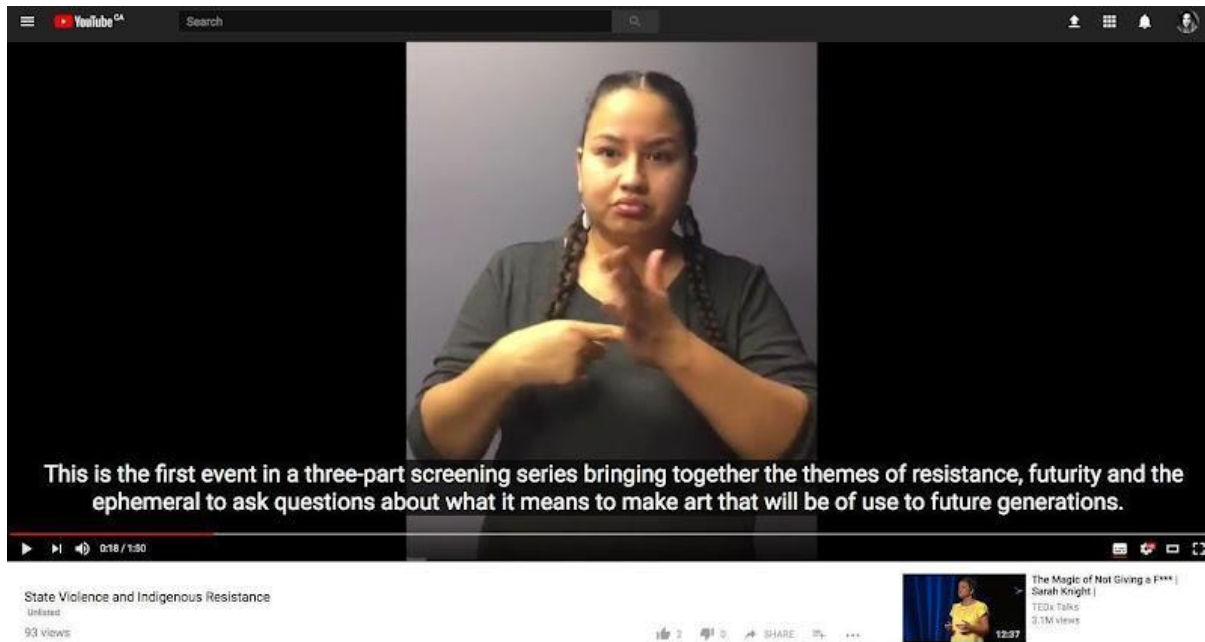


Image Description: Screen grab of vlog promoting State Violence and Indigenous Resistance. (Deaf Spectrum)

4.3.2 Guidelines for Hiring and Working with Interpreters

Below are some guidelines for how to go about hiring and working with d/Deaf and hearing interpreters:

Check with the interpreter about their expectations or needs and ask who they like working with. ASL interpreters often work with another interpreter or with a small team of interpreters, particularly if the assignment is over one hour. **If you are organizing a big event, find an interpreter who will manage interpretation with you.** They can help you plan shifts and put together a team they feel comfortable with.

Ask your interpreter if they are familiar with specific language that people may use at your event. For example, you may need to clarify words like “crip,” “queer,” “two-spirited,” and using preferred pronouns.

Give the interpreter as much information as possible about the event when making an initial contact or inquiry.

²¹ Deaf Spectrum, [“State Violence and Indigenous Resistance.”](#) YouTube Video, January 19, 2018.

Ask the interpreter what their rates are. Do not give them a budget. **Interpreters charge varying rates.** Do not disclose these rates to other interpreters.

ASL interpreters typically interpret during social events, breaks, and intermissions. **Work with them to make sure they get appropriate breaks.** If there is food being served at your event, provide the interpreters lunch at no additional cost.

Provide an agenda of the event with spellings of people's names and copies of speakers notes and talks. Give presenters a deadline to send drafts of their talks to you or the interpreters.

Make sure interpreters are clearly visible to people sitting in the audience. Reserve seats for interpreters at the front of the room so that they can see each other while they are working. Page has more information on seating and layout. **If you live in a rural area, include travel costs for ASL interpreters in your budget.** It may be difficult to book ASL interpreters in your region.

Budget more than the upfront cost for ASL interpreters. There may be fees for going over initial time estimates and some interpreters have cancelation fees.

4.4 Creating Vlogs

Typically, a vlog is a discussion or information post in the form of an online video. Interpreters are increasingly using vlogs to communicate online. Vlogs can advertise open calls for submissions, artist opportunities, and event promotion. Page has more information on marketing and outreach. Here are some guidelines and tips to consider when creating a vlog:

Hire d/Deaf interpreters to make your vlog. We recommend [Deaf Spectrum](#).

Budget for vlog production in your marketing plan.

Deaf Spectrum will post your vlog on their YouTube Channel. However, you should also do your own work to get the vlog to d/Deaf communities and d/Deaf artists.

Post the vlog on your website and social media. Ask your friends and colleagues to share the post.

For exhibitions, use vlogs to provide interpretations of curatorial statements and introductions. Show the vlog on a loop near the text. For an example, please see the image below along with its image description.



Image description: A photo of an ASL vlog mounted on gallery wall as part of Crip Interiors: MIXER at Tangled Art + Disability. (Alice Lo)

4.5 Captioning Technology

4.5.1 Live Captioning

To accommodate people with hearing loss who do not know ASL, use live captioning and/or Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services. **Live captioning is the live, word-for-word transcription of speech to text.** The text is projected onto a large screen, laptops, or other mobile devices. Live captioning has several names, including CART services, speech-to-text translation, or simply, captioning.

4.5.2 Closed Captioning and Open Captioning

People use closed and open captioning in video content to describe sound and transcribe dialogue. Below is an outline of the differences between closed and open captioning. Understanding each format's advantages and limitations will help you determine which one is better for your video.

4.5.2a Closed Captions

Closed captions give viewers the option of switching the captions on or off. They are the most common form of captioning and can be identified by the [CC] symbol. Media players or video sharing sites (e.g. YouTube or Vimeo) have to support closed captions to display them. Level Access, a digital access resource, has [more information on closed captions and media player compatibility](#).

Advantages

The viewer can turn closed captions on and off.
You can easily edit closed captions.
Closed captions come in a range of file formats and are suitable for many media players.

Limitations

Closed captions only work with supported media players.
Closed captions place responsibility on the viewer to understand how to turn the captions on and off.
Depending on your movie format, closed captions can come in a separate file that people need to distribute with the movie.

4.5.2b Open Captions

Open captions, also known as burned-in, baked-on, or hard-coded captions, are seen by everyone who watches the video. They are a permanent feature of the video and you cannot turn them off.
Cinemas commonly use open captions as many do not have the equipment for closed captions. Most cinemas that offer open captions will have them at specific movie showings.

Advantages

You can set the style of captions, including font color, size, and placement.
Open captions do not need special functionality from media players.
There is no need to worry about a separate caption file.

Limitations

Viewers who do not want captions cannot disable them.
Open captions can degrade in quality and become difficult to read if the video also degrades and becomes blurry from buffering, size reduction, or format change.



Image description: Photo of people sitting in chairs in a circle in a parking lot. There are words written in chalk on the ground in the center of the circle that reads “Is moistening lips a feminist issue? How?” (Bunker 2)

4.6 Assistive Listening Devices and Technology

Hearing and hearing loss varies across sound frequencies. Often, people with partial hearing loss have difficulty distinguishing specific sounds from background noise. They may not be able to hear conversations in a crowded room, lyrics in a song, or directions on a busy street. Assistive Listening Systems (ALSs), sometimes called Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs), are essentially in-ear amplifiers for a range of frequencies. They separate and amplify different sounds, particularly speech, from background noise. ALSs improve the “speech to noise ratio.”²²

Try to have ALSs available, particularly for crowded spaces, performances with ‘overlapping’ sounds and speech, or events on busy streets. There are three types of ALSs: FM, infrared, and inductive loop technologies. Although all three technologies are effective, each one has their advantages and disadvantages. For information on these technologies, please visit [the National Association of the Deaf](#).

Other important assistive devices for d/Deaf and hard of hearing people:

Have screen reader technology for any screen that displays text.

²² David Baquis, [“Assistive Listening Systems and Devices.”](#) National Association of the Deaf, accessed December 2019.

Have pen and paper on hand to assist communication.
If possible, have a telephone with TTY service and text messaging at the information desk.

Module 5: Non-Visual Culture in the Arts

In this module, we focus on non-visual culture in the arts and ways to improve access for blind and low-vision people. Access practices for blind and low-vision people in the arts are vital and necessary. Contemporary Western culture is ocularcentric, meaning it is biased towards and dominated by the visual with images as a primary mode of entertainment and communication. As Carmen Papalia (2014) tells us, when we work with non-visual cultures and access practices, we allow ourselves to creatively reimagine basic assumptions of how we make and experience art.

We developed this module in partnership with [VibraFusion Lab](#) and artist and scholar [Hannah Thomson](#). We also refer to knowledge and resources from [Vocal Eye](#), a live descriptive arts service, and the [Art Beyond Sight](#) resource website.

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5.6 SERVICE ANIMALS

5.1 Blindness Arts

Hannah Thompson and Vanessa Warne advanced the term **blindness arts** “in contrast with and as a companion to ‘visual arts.’”²³ Blindness arts describe art and performance that does not assume an ocularcentric (visually dominant) experience. It also highlights the creative potential of accessibility tools, such as audio description, touch tours, and exhibition podcasts. Additionally, blindness arts ask us to challenge our normative assumptions when we speak about art and culture. For example, artist Aaron McPeake suggests

²³ Hannah Thompson and Vanessa Warne, “Blindness Arts: An Introduction,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (2018).

we refer to audience members as “beholders” rather than “viewers” or “spectators.”²⁴ In this guide, we recognize that we benefit from the disruption that difference makes. Thompson holds blindness as an aesthetic position rather than an object of curiosity, meaning that blindness creates and appreciates art in unique and valuable ways. She uses the term **blindness gain**, in contrast to ‘vision loss’, to refer to what we can gain from the experience of blindness.²⁵ Blindness gain lets us all have a richer experience of the arts through touch tours, audio description, vibrotactile technology, and other non-visual arts and access practices.

5.2 Visual Description

In this section, we outline the basics of audio, image, and video description. We also highlight the innovative ways that people use visual description in Disability arts and on social media.



Image description: Photo of scholar Hannah Thompson touching an ancient Greek marble statue. (Hannah Thompson)

5.2.1 Audio, Verbal, and Live Description:

Audio, verbal, and live description is the art of talking pictorially. Sometimes, people use these terms interchangeably. While audio description refers to description that people listen to, verbal description is more generally “a way of using words to represent the visual world,”²⁶ which may also include writing descriptive text that someone reads aloud later. People may listen to recorded audio description, while live description is said by a person in real time. Blind and low-vision people may need audio description to access spaces with important visual details, including performances, art exhibitions, parades, sports, and other cultural events. Describers do not keep a running commentary, instead they talk about essential visual aspects of the event or artwork to help listeners fully participate in the experience.²⁷ At a performance, users often hear the description through a small handheld receiver and single earpiece. At an art exhibition, a verbal description includes label information such as the artist’s name, artist’s nationality, title of the artwork, date made, dimensions or scale of the work,

²⁴ Aaron McPeake, “Bell Bronzes: Reflections on a Blind Visual Arts Practice,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (2018).

²⁵ Hannah Thomson, *Reviewing Blindness in French Fiction, 1789–2013* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

²⁶ Lou Giansante, “[Writing Verbal Descriptions for Audio Guides.](#)” *Art Beyond Sight*, accessed December 29, 2019.

²⁷ Rebecca Singh, “[Live Describe.](#)” *Theatre Local*, accessed December 30, 2019.

media, and technique. Importantly, verbal description describes the subject matter and composition of the work.²⁸ Page has technical information on audiovisuals in exhibition spaces. Here is [video documentation of a verbal described tour at the Guggenheim Museum](#) in New York.²⁹

5.2.1a Audio Description Guidelines

Here are some important guidelines to follow when using Audio Description in the arts:

Try to have verbal description of all visual work at your exhibitions and performances, including films, videos, animations, and slideshow presentations.

If you run a gallery or exhibition space, train your staff and volunteers to provide verbal description when requested. Verbal tours of a gallery may take longer than other tours, allow time for staff to provide this service.

If you cannot hire an audio describer for your event, the host or emcee should describe the space at the beginning of the event to acknowledge any blind or low-vision people in the room. They can describe the dimensions of the space, major colours, and general visual elements.

Recognize that descriptions of bodies, spaces, and art are never neutral. Describers may be unaware of the politics surrounding a visual representation and talk about it in ways that conflict with the artists' or subjects' intentions. These descriptions can also be harmful to audience members. For example, a describer may mistakenly use incorrect pronouns for the subject or artist, which then also harms other trans and gender non-conforming people in the space. Consult with artists, subjects, and affected communities to help script descriptions.

If possible, include artists when you create audio description for their work. You can even ask the artist to do their own audio description recordings. These recordings are a great way for visitors to connect to the artist and their process. See the next section, Creative Audio Description, for more information.

To learn more about how to create audio/verbal description for your projects, you can visit [Art Beyond Sight: Handbook for Museums and Educators](#),³⁰ which takes you through the process of creating accessible programming for people with vision loss.

5.2.2 Creative Audio Description

Artists and curators are experimenting with audio description in innovative ways by paying artists to audio describe their own work rather than hiring a professional describer. This form of description acknowledges that we do not all see or interpret art in the same way whereas

²⁸ Clara Ines Rojas-Sebesta and Elisabeth Axel, "[Learning Tool: Verbal Description](#)," Art Beyond Sight, accessed December 30, 2019.

²⁹ Artbeyondsight, "[ABS: Verbal Description Demonstration at Guggenheim: Krantz](#)," YouTube Video, September 16, 2013.

³⁰ Clara Ines Rojas-Sebesta and Elisabeth Axel, "[Handbook for Museums and Educators](#)," Art Beyond Sight, accessed December 30, 2019.

standardized audio description assumes a uniform viewpoint. However, many blind and low-vision audience members prefer using professional audio description when engaging with artwork.

Whether you use artists or professionals, it is important to consider the impact of your decision on audience members who use description. Be transparent about your intentions and choices. You can listen to an example of Nova Scotian artist Cecil Day verbally describing her woodcut prints by visiting [Bodies in Translation: Aging and Creativity](#).³¹

5.2.3 Image Description

Image descriptions provide textual information about non-text content. Visitors, audio describers, and screen readers can read this text aloud, or in any other form that is best for the user or presenter.³²



Image description: This photo shows the grounds of the former Pelican Lake Indian Residential School. Artist Lara Kramer is standing at the base of a tall conifer tree. Kramer is looking into the distance to the right with a frightened expression in her eyes. She is wrapped in a white sheet at her chest that drapes below her feet and which has dirt and red stains at the hem. She is grabbing the tree with her hand, extending her arm above her head. Her other arm is bent with her elbow resting in the crease of her left thigh. She prepares to mount the tree with her leg bent and foot in the crease of the tree. Her other foot is on the ground. She is standing amidst plants. There is a red cord wrapped around her left foot that travels up her arm, lower jaw,

³¹ Bodies in Translation, "[Cecil Day](#)," Art in Translation, February, 2018.

³² "[Image Description](#)," Stanford University, June 9, 2015.

shoulder, and upper back. There is a white two-story building behind her, and another two-story yellow building in the near distance. There is a tree stump to the right of Kramer. (Lara Kramer) Above is an example of image description created for the image from Phantom, Stills, and Vibrations, a performance and sound installation that immerses audiences in the sights, sounds, and textures of the land on which a residential school once stood close to Lac Seul, ON. The immersive work confronts the brutal and complex relationships between Indigenous peoples and Settler society.

This text demonstrates the richness of image description when working with artists and other people who understand its context. Without this knowledge, the image description might not have the same depth and complexity. At times, this level of description will not be possible, for example, the artwork may be unknown to the describer. There may also be issues around the politics of language, similar to those discussed in audio description above. We must remember that descriptions are never neutral. Best practices are emerging but are likely to change as we all navigate the complexities of language.

5.2.4 Image Description and Social Media

Many people are adding their own image descriptions on social media. As images, like art, comics, and memes, are increasingly used to communicate online, it is important to include blind and low-vision people in those conversations. Some social media have accessibility features with image description but they generally describe very little or the wrong content altogether. By creating our own descriptions, we can include people in the full experience of our articles and posts.

Driven by disability community activism, this practice reveals how disability aesthetics and social media activism can take up space—reshaping, inventing, and transforming methods of access and how we represent disability. Often, people insert a description in square brackets at the beginning or end of a caption, or they write “image description:” in their post and proceed to describe the image.

5.2.5 Described Video

Described video is similar to audio description. There are several types, including delayed and live versions. To learn more about described video, please visit [Accessible Media Inc.’s website](#) for details.³³

Please note that their best practice guidelines may or may not fit with a social justice and disability justice informed approach to description. For example, they advise you to use person-first language for disability (see Language) and avoid describing race or ethnicity, which may not be appropriate for the artists and/or subjects. Remember to consult with the person being described and/or artists.

5.3 Vibrotactile Arts and Technology

³³ [“What is Described Video,”](#) Accessible Media Inc., November 2, 2016.

Vibrotactile arts let users feel sound waves. As sound waves travel through air and other materials, they cause them to vibrate with different frequencies. Think about a tuning fork that vibrates with a particular tone, or a bee's wings quickly sweeping backwards and forwards with a buzzing noise. For most hearing individuals, these sound waves vibrate the eardrum, a thin membrane stretched inside the ear canal, which the brain then translates into auditory signals. While we usually think of sound moving through air, we can also feel these mechanical vibrations through touch. Vibrotactile technology separates audio signals into discrete vibrotactile output channels with voice coils. We can place these outputs on the body to create a high-resolution audio-tactile experience through direct connection with musical instruments, live sound, and digital sound files. Designed to be experienced as tactile stimuli, rather than acoustic sound, vibrotactile art is accessible to a greater diversity of artists and audiences alike. As an exciting example, [VibraFusionLab](#) in London, Ontario uses vibrotactile art to research and develop innovations in art and technology. It uses this format to combine ideas of alternative language, communication, and emotion in artistic practice. VibraFusionLab also advances vibrotactile art as an interactive, multisensory approach to equal participation for disabled creators and audiences. It offers new and unique ways for people to produce art using this innovative tactile method and have alternative opportunities for creative expression.³⁴



*Image description: A photo of a group of young people kneeling on a vibratactive platform in front of a row of large screens. Installation shot of Deirdre Logue's exhibition *Admiring All We Accomplish*, Tangled Art Gallery, 2017. (Tangled Art + Disability)*

³⁴ David Bobier, "[Studies in Sound and Vibration](#)," VibraFusionLab, accessed January 1, 2020.

5.4 Touch Tours

For many people, touch is the primary way they acquire information or access a work of art. For others, tactile experiences help to complete their mental image of an object. Tactile art experiences can include: replicas, models, props, objects which convey an aspect of the work, and contemporary art made to be touched.

5.4.1 Touch Tours for Theatre

In theatre, it is important for people to have access to the stage and set prior to a performance. By having an early touch tour, blind and low-vision people can access details about the space and production that may not be available otherwise. Patrons will explore the space and may like to handle selected props, costumes, and furniture. Touch tours usually last around 30 minutes. They should involve audio describers, front of house staff, technical staff, stage management, and the company to provide a full experience and work smoothly.³⁵

5.4.2 Giving a Guided Touch Tour

Here are a few tips to consider when giving a guided touch tour:

When welcoming and meeting a group, give a verbal description of the space to help orient people. Section 5.2 has more information on visual description.

As you move from one gallery space to another, give brief verbal descriptions of the spaces you pass through even if they are not on the tour. Just a few words will give visitors a sense of the exhibition or museum.

Limit guided touch tours to 3 to 5 objects.

Keep the tour group small, with 3 to 6 people at most. While one or two people explore the art by touch, give a verbal background to others while they wait.

While visitors tour and explore the objects and artwork, encourage dialogue and responses from the people taking the tour.

When choosing objects for the tour, be aware of the pedestal height and the object scale relative to the viewer. It is best if visitors can reach all parts of the object. If not, provide tactile diagrams.

In a guided touch tour, as with verbal description tours, allow additional time for visitors to process tactile experiences.

Any interactive program is appropriate for tactile experiences. Train tour guides and lecturers to include tactile-friendly work on their public tours. Keep in mind that introducing a tactile element requires more time for the tour.

Tactile experiences are appropriate for a variety of audiences. People with developmental or cognitive disabilities may benefit from multi-sensory information. Tactile art experiences are beneficial for most people as it gives a

³⁵ Vocal Eyes, [Guidelines for Touch Tours](#), October, 2016

sense of the objects' textures, weight, and feel. Using touch tours with a broad audience may also help in fundraising.

Verbally describe your tactile objects and experiences. Try to make the description and other background information available before the museum visit, either on your website, in a mailing packet, or at your information desk or gift shop.

If possible, think about tactile art and touch tour ideas in the early stages of planning an exhibition. By giving yourself plenty of time, it will be easier to gather the resources and objects necessary for a touch tour. Your curators may also find appropriate objects during their searches.

You can adapt many of these techniques to the classroom for pre- or post-museum visit sessions. Consider including handling sessions and other tactile experiences with replicas, models, facsimiles, props, and tactile diagrams with verbal guidance of the hands.

If you normally charge for tours, consider offering a free day for touch tours. By inviting disabled people to your space, you create publicity for your accessibility program and allow for valuable feedback from disabled people. Page has more information on accessible feedback. This outreach lets disabled visitors understand what your museum has to offer and encourages support for your accessibility efforts.



Image description: A photo of two people touching a prop with a horse head that a third person is wearing. (Vocal Eye)

5.5 Sighted Guides

Sighted guides, originally developed for blind and low-vision people, can also be helpful for those who need balance or mobility support. Typically, a blind or low-vision person lightly holds the guide's arm above the elbow and allows the guide to walk one-half step ahead. This method allows them to feel and follow the guide's movements.

Anybody can be a sighted guide. For museums and organizations, try to train all volunteers and staff to be sighted guides. Here are some tips from the Art Beyond Sight website on how to be a sighted guide³⁶:

Do not assume that people need help. Always ask before providing assistance.

Once you have confirmed with the person that they would like a guide, **position yourself slightly in front of the person you are guiding.**

Ask which side they prefer to use and touch the person's arm with your elbow on that side. They can then take your arm above the elbow.

If someone needs extra support for walking, bend your supporting arm parallel to the ground so they can apply weight to your arm.

Give any guiding signals only when you need to change motion. Signaling early creates confusion.

Never push, pull, or grab a blind person. It can frighten people and is often embarrassing.

Do not shout. Most blind people have normal hearing. Speak clearly and strongly if you know that someone also has a hearing problem.

Introduce yourself. Not everyone recognizes voices or remembers them.

Identify yourself when entering a room and let the blind person know when you are leaving. Do not leave a blind person talking to an empty room.

Do not leave a blind person standing alone in an open space. Take them to a stationary object, wall, counter, or seat as a point of reference.

Give explicit directions to a blind person, such as "on your left," "to the right of your plate," "three blocks north." You can also use a clock system, for example, "to your three o'clock."

Do not use hand signals.

5.6 Service Animals

Service animals are any animal that assists a disabled person. Many disabled people use service animals to access the world in ways that are easier and/or safer for them. Keep the following tips in mind when dealing with service animals:

Welcome service animals at all events and exhibitions.

Ask visitors who are allergic to animals to let staff know as soon as possible. If there is an event occurring, and a visitor notifies staff or volunteers of an allergy, then you can request that someone care for the animal outside of the space. Provide a volunteer for that visitor to guide and assist them.

³⁶ "[Sighted Guide Technique](#)," Art Beyond Sight, March 15, 2015.

**Any animal can be a service animal.
Ensure that you properly train all staff and volunteers in how to interact with people with service animals.
Notify artists that there may be service animals around their work.**

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act website has more tips for [how to behave around service animals](#).³⁷

³⁷ Greg Thomson, "[How to Behave Around a Service Animal](#)," Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act, August 20, 2018.

Resources

Tangled Art + Disability

[Tangled Art + Disability](#) is an organization that brings together all kinds of people and practices to explore art, culture, and disability.

Creative Users Projects

[Creative Users](#) is a community and disability led artist platform that explores the intersection of art and design practices, accessibility, and disability. Our work to date has been driven by the desire to contribute to cultivating accessible arts and practice, as well as the Disability arts sector.

The Good Host Program

With Inside Out Theatre's [Good Host Program](#) we work to open up the theatre going experience by facilitating accessible performances like ASL Interpreted nights, Audio Described plays, and relaxed performances.

Disability Arts International

[Disability Arts International](#) is a website and regular digital newsletter developed and coordinated by the British Council. Disability Arts International aims to promote the work of the exciting generation of excellent disabled artists, disabled-led companies, and inclusive arts organizations. It also aims to share the ways arts organizations are increasing access to the arts for disabled people as audiences and visitors.

DisArts

By offering local and international arts-based platforms on which audiences can experience authentic disabled voices, we challenge the cultural confusion, misinformation, stigma, and discrimination too often associated with and experienced by people with physical and mental differences.

[DisArt](#) points to a new reality in which Disabled and nondisabled cultures work together. With our Grand Rapids partners, we have started a social movement that invites disability into the public sphere.

Disability Arts Online

[Disability Arts Online](#) is a small but committed disability-led organization set up to advance Disability arts through the pages of our journal. Our raison d'être is to support disabled artists, as much as anything by getting the word out about the fantastic art being produced by artists within the sector.

We give disabled artists a platform to blog and share thoughts and images describing artistic practice, projects and just the daily stuff of finding inspiration to be creative.

Sins Invalid

[Sins Invalid](#) is a performance project that incubates and celebrates artists with disabilities, centralizing artists of color and queer and gender-variant artists as communities who have been historically marginalized. Our performance work explores the themes of sexuality, embodiment and the disabled body. Conceived and led by disabled people of color, we develop and present cutting-edge work where normative paradigms of "normal" and "sexy" are challenged, offering instead a vision of beauty and sexuality inclusive of all individuals and communities.

Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition Design

Developed as one of the first access guides for arts and cultural spaces, demonstrating the Smithsonian Museum's commitment to inclusivity, [this comprehensive guide](#) provides detailed and logistic direction for how to mount museum exhibitions in compliance with the Americans with Disability Act and, expanded beyond this legislation, offers standards based on the museum's best practices.

Accessibility Toolkit: A guide to making art spaces accessible

[This toolkit](#) was developed out of Humber College in consultation with many disability arts galleries and arts practitioners. Covering many of the areas covered in these Vital Practices, offers practical and conceptual information for making art spaces accessible and fostering inclusivity in cultural spaces.

Reel Access Resource

From large-scale film festivals to individual film screenings, [this booklet](#) will give you resources on accessibility for people with disabilities so the magic of cinema is available to everyone! Accessibility is a journey: use this guide on your path to becoming more accessible.

Art Beyond Sight

[Art Beyond Sight](#) Educational Resources is a user-friendly website that combines online learning experiences with an extensive collection of teaching materials, networking and community building tools, and an advocacy and grassroots forum.

Beyond Compliance

This tool provides information for what your organization can do to go beyond compliance with Ontario's accessibility laws to create a more accessible organization. It is not meant to measure an organization's compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (or AODA), but rather to provide an organized way to establish a baseline of accessibility, identify new initiatives to increase the accessibility of your organization and track organizational change over time.

Creative Users Projects: Accessing the Arts

[Accessing the Arts](#) is Creative Users' online events listing featuring highlights from Toronto's vibrant accessible arts scene. Use this as your go to source for all things Disability art and accessible art-related. If you are interested in posting your event, send us a message about what you're doing and how you think it's accessible!

AccessTO

[AccessTO](#) is a not for profit organization that was created after a group of health professionals felt that there was a need for more in-depth reviews of the physical environments in our community. Until a more universal approach to construction is implemented in Ontario, we give you this blog to assist in your social endeavors.

Access Now

AccessNow is all about sharing accessibility information around the world. Our goal is to map as many places as we possibly can, and we invite you to help us! A worldwide community, passionate about change, together we can empower each other to have access *now*.

Access Activators

The [Access Activators: Relaxed Performance Consulting](#) team was formed through a pilot initiative organized by the British Council in Canada, with the collaborative support of Harbourfront Centre and Tangled Arts+Disability, and is intended to make the relaxed performance model more widely available in arts and cultural spaces in Ontario.

Generator: Artist Producer Resource

[Generator's Artist Producer Resource](#) provides tips, tricks, and best practices for producing live performance in Canada - from Accessibility to Volunteers.

Cahoots Deaf Artists and Theatre's Toolkit (DATT)

Project Manager, Anita Small, Deaf Community Consultant, Catherine MacKinnon, and Joanne Cripps, External Deaf Consultant, along with the staff at Cahoots have created [a comprehensive free online resource](#) to advance the level of engagement and collaborations between theatre organizations and the Deaf community, including artists and audiences.

Realwheels Theatre

[Realwheels Theatre](#), based in Vancouver, is proud to occupy a valuable and necessary niche in the arts community. We aim to inspire a new generation of artists to participate in the arts and further develop an audience to embrace the inclusion of disability onstage, and, more importantly, offstage in the real world.
