

Planning With Inclusion as the Goal

In the year 2003, more than 54 million Americans live with disabilities. Because of advances in medical science, the number of people surviving disabling accidents and conditions has grown and the proportion of people with disabilities in American society is increasing. As a result of federal legislation focusing on education, employment, and access to public and private services and facilities, people with disabilities are increasingly becoming an economic force, as well as gaining access to the cultural mainstream.

Further, 37 million Americans are age 65 or older. By the year 2030, the Census Bureau estimates that one out of four people will be over the age of 65. The profile of older adults is changing. People over 65 are healthier, work longer, are more interested in volunteer opportunities and have more resources than in previous generations. Increasingly, they will be more involved in recreational and cultural activities. Cultural organizations must plan for inclusion by providing fully accessible spaces and programs that welcome people of all ages and abilities.

As these demographic changes take place, the concept of universal design in architecture has provided a new way of thinking about inclusion. The goal of universal design is to make the human environment usable by as many people as possible.

Cultural organizations and agencies must move beyond old concepts that define people with disabilities and older adults as a “special” group of people. The focus of cultural organizations needs to shift to a policy of

“State arts agencies have the opportunity to change the way their grantees think about the ADA. They can help their constituents embrace and not fear what the program is about. It is a work in progress—and not meant to be done tomorrow. Why do it? Because it is the right thing to do. The arts are for everyone.”

Wayne Lawson, Executive Director, Ohio State Arts Council

inclusion, a way of ensuring that people with disabilities and older adults have the same opportunities as other participants. Accessibility leads to inclusion and should be viewed as an organizational asset that creates a larger audience by engaging everyone in the arts and humanities. Older adults and people with disabilities will patronize organizations where they feel comfortable and welcomed.

Key Planning Points for Cultural Organizations

- Accessibility is an organizational asset.
- Access is a civil rights issue. Access to cultural programs is a legal requirement of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. State humanities councils and state arts agencies receiving federal funding need to understand these legal requirements.
- Involve people with disabilities and people of all ages throughout the accessibility planning process by establishing an access advisory committee.
- Include people with disabilities in the organization's definition of diversity.
- Plan for the inclusion of people with disabilities and people of all ages as an integral part of long-range or strategic plans.
- Articulate inclusiveness in value statements, goals and program strategies.
- Be a leader. Broker new partnerships; facilitate learning experiences and reward excellence.
- Include individuals with disabilities as staff, board members and volunteers.
- Remember that accessibility is only one means to a larger goal— inclusion in the cultural community of people of all ages, with and without disabilities.

“To be creative in later life provides an invaluable model of what is possible as we age, for our children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and society. As a role model in your family or in the lives of others, you can shape individual thinking and societal policies about aging. Historically, creativity has distinguished elders as “keepers” of the culture, those who pass the history and values of family and community on to the next generation...most important, aging and creativity present an unparalleled opportunity for us as individuals, to grow as we grow older, in ways that in younger years we could not even have dreamed.”

“The Creative Age” by Gene D. Cohen, M.D., PH.D., Avon Books, Inc., 2000

Objectives and Strategies

When developing a plan to achieve accessibility and inclusion, an organization should define its direct internal and external objectives, including:

- Thorough review of procedures and means of interacting with constituents.
- Appointment of an accessibility coordinator.
- Accessibility of buildings and grounds.
- Accessibility of public meetings.
- Design of print materials for legibility and easy comprehension.
- Accessibility of Web site for use by people with hearing, mobility and visual disabilities.
- Accessibility of other communication systems.
- Programming respectful and reflective of the community.

Indirect objectives for promoting accessibility and inclusion may involve:

- Educating constituents about their legal obligations and effective ways to achieve accessible programs and activities.
- Providing technical aid to constituents to remove physical barriers.
- Serving as an information resource and model of accessibility.
- Assessing the economic impact of audience expansion on cultural programming.
- Creating partnerships that promote inclusion and access.

“In order for a state agency to have a commitment to ADA, the ground work must be done by the 504/ADA coordinator. The coordinator must ensure that staff and board are educated and continuously updated regarding issues of compliance. The Ohio Arts Council’s access work includes: mandating that at least one person with a disability serve on every panel; establishing a statewide network of artists with disabilities; and professional development grants to assist their careers. None of this would have been possible without our Access Advisory Committee of artists with disabilities, keeping staff and board aware of access issues, and, most important, the strong and steadfast support of our Executive Director and our Board.”

Phyllis Hairston, Building Diverse Audiences & 504/ADA Coordinator,
Ohio Arts Council

Planning and Partnership Questions

No single strategy or plan is right for every cultural organization. A plan should be tailored to meet the needs of an organization's existing and future constituencies. The best way to do this is by including people with disabilities and people of all ages in the planning process. The following questions can help clarify what strategies are appropriate for your organization.

Q. For grant making organizations, such as state humanities councils and state arts agencies, what is the organization's commitment to ensuring that people with disabilities and people of all ages have access to the cultural activities within their area?

A. An organization should work with staff and representatives from the field to:

- Provide technical assistance to applicants and grantees.
- Ask grantees to document their accessibility efforts or assessments.
- Include accessible language in grant making criteria and application forms.
- Fund accessibility projects as part of audience expansion, technology programs and inclusiveness initiatives.
- Establish a complaint procedure.

Q. How can a cultural organization work together with its constituency to make cultural resources more inclusive and accessible to everyone?

A. Many tools exist to aid this discussion. The organization can send a questionnaire to the field to elicit the accessibility achievements and needs of constituents. It can hold strategic planning forums that include participants from other cultural organizations and from the disability community. The most useful tool is the creation of an ongoing advisory committee that includes people, with and without disabilities, who, along with staff and board members, help to develop the inclusive aspects of the organization's strategic plan. It is also important to have people with disabilities on review panels, on staff and on the board of directors.

Q. What are some strategies a cultural organization can use to help constituents achieve more inclusive environments?

A. In addition to funding, the organization can provide information and technical assistance with assessment, development and execution of accessibility plans. It can offer access workshops and include accessibility on the agenda at statewide or regional cultural conferences. It can make

accessibility resources available in print material, electronic postings of access resources on the organization's Web site and find ways for other groups with good track records to share their success stories.

Remember that many nonprofit organizations, as well as state and federal agencies dealing with disability and accessibility issues, may also provide information and services.

Q. How can a cultural organization promote partnerships?

A. A cultural organization, particularly a regional, state or local arts agency or state humanities council, knows its constituency and is familiar with other cultural organizations in its area. It can work to promote partnerships between complementary organizations. Strategies might include sharing the cost of equipment, promoting joint fundraising projects and producing cultural access guides. An organization may encourage constituents to form partnerships with private foundations and corporations to provide services, products or funding. An organization may also acknowledge its constituents' successes through awards, in "best practices" publications and feature articles, or on Web sites.

Q. What are the steps in planning for an accessible environment?

A. The first step in the planning process is making the commitment to accessibility. Assessing the organization's current accessibility assets and planning for what it needs should follow. Finally, an organization should advertise its accessibility assets to its constituents.

Q. How does a cultural organization evaluate its accessibility assets?

A. Chart what accessibility assets the organization has and what assets it needs to meet or exceed legal standards. Look at the buildings, grounds, programming, how meetings are conducted and communications systems.

"We at the Arts Endowment believe that it is important to listen to and celebrate the diverse voices of America, to literally hear and see all America singing and talking and painting and writing. Through lessons gleaned from the challenges of everyday life, Americans with disabilities have an important contribution to make to our democracy. We need to challenge America's sense of ease and entitlement, and demand that our nation open the doors of our cultural institutions so that people with disabilities may contribute their vision and craft to our country's journey through the rich and complex landscape of the 21st century."

William Ivey, Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts (1998-2001)

Examine procedures for interaction with employees, volunteers, program participants and audience members. The assessment should involve staff, the board of directors, outside consultants, the accessibility advisory committee, audience members and program participants.

Strategies should be developed to obtain needed accessibility assets as part of the overall strategic plan. An organization must determine:

- Who will be involved in implementing the plan and what their roles will be.
- What outside professional help will be needed.
- What it will cost to implement the plan.
- How the work will be funded.
- Whether the work will be done all at once or in stages.

Q. How does an organization use its accessibility assets to attract new audiences?

A. All too often organizations do substantial work to achieve inclusiveness but neglect to tell anyone about it. An important part of the planning process is to evaluate the organization's current marketing plan to see that it promotes the organization's accessibility assets, and to assure that its marketing tools reach people with various disabilities.

Q. When does the planning process end?

A. Planning is an organizational tool. Although a particular plan ends when the objectives and goals are reached (or a determination is made that they cannot be reached), the planning process never ends. Access issues, in particular, need ongoing attention. A permanent accessibility advisory committee can help keep the organization on track. A sound organization uses planning as a way to keep the objectives and goals of the organization balanced and to evaluate how well its mission is being met.

RESOURCES

Planning for Accessibility

“A State Arts Agency Strategic Planning Tool Kit”

Published in 2000 by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) with advice and funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the tool kit explores the conceptual basis of planning, outlines the process to use in creating a good strategic plan and includes case studies.

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA)
1029 Vermont Avenue, NW, 2nd Floor
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 347-6352 voice
(202) 347-5948 TTY
(202) 737-0526 fax
www.nasaa-arts.org

“A Universal Environment: Beyond Access to Opportunity”

The New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) created this useful resource for accessibility planning, which is available on their Web site.

New York State Council on the Arts
175 Varick Street
New York, NY 10014
(212) 627-4455 voice
www.nysca.org/UniversalPlanning.html

The Office for AccessAbility of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)

The NEA Office for AccessAbility, established in 1976, is the Endowment’s advocacy/technical assistance arm for people with disabilities, older adults, veterans and people living in institutions.

Work includes:

- Providing technical assistance to staff and grantees on making the arts fully accessible and compliant with the Endowment’s Section 504 regulations and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Initiating cooperative projects and leadership initiatives with other federal agencies and nonprofit groups to educate professionals concerning accessibility issues.
- Encouraging support for the needs of older adults, individuals with disabilities and people living in institutions.

- Assisting applicants and grantees with project development involving targeted groups.
- Organizing and presenting panels, seminars and workshops for NEA staff, grantees and other federal agencies.

National Endowment for the Arts

Office for AccessAbility

1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20506

(202) 682-5532 voice

(202) 682-5496 TTY

(202) 682-5715 fax

www.arts.endow.gov/partner/Accessibility/Brochure.html

Statistical Information

U.S. Census Bureau Statistics

The United States Bureau of the Census is the official resource for social, demographic and economic statistics. They also provide data on disability.

Disability Statistics (1997)

- Nearly 1 in 5 people—54 million—said they have some level of disability, while 1 in 8—33 million—report they have a severe disability.
- Among the population aged 15 and over, 25 million have difficulty walking a quarter of a mile or climbing a flight of 10 stairs, or have to use an ambulatory aid.
- 2.2 million are wheelchair users.
- 6.4 million use canes, crutches or walkers. 16.4 million have other mobility impairments.
- 18 million have difficulty lifting and carrying a 10-pound bag of groceries or grasping small objects.
- 7.7 million people have trouble seeing the words and letters in ordinary newspaper print (even with glasses).
- 8 million people have difficulty hearing or are deaf.
- 14.3 million have a mental disability, including 3.5 million with a learning disability.

U.S. Census Bureau

Washington, DC 20233

www.census.gov/hhes/www/disability.html