



photo by VSA arts staff.

Arts for All Gallery, Atlanta, GA: Visual artist Marquetta Johnson with her work

Training for Staff, Board Members, Volunteers and Constituents

A cultural organization's most important accessibility asset is its people—staff, board members, volunteers and constituents (including applicants and grantees). The time and energy invested in training people to understand and accommodate those with disabilities can make the difference between simply fulfilling legal obligations and providing a truly welcoming experience for everyone.

The goal of any training program is to better educate participants on how to be more inclusive—to be comfortable involving individuals with disabilities in their activities.

Always include people with disabilities when developing and delivering training programs (i.e., members of the accessibility advisory committee) because such first-hand learning increases awareness and encourages cooperation. Individuals with disabilities add a valuable perspective, can recount experiences they have had as staff, participants or visitors, and demonstrate effective techniques to increase accessibility. Be sure to leave enough time for questions and discussion.

Trainings should model accessibility. Hold trainings in accessible spaces, provide handouts in large print, have a sample in braille, be sure videos are captioned and/or audio described, and provide sign language interpreters so that people can experience accessibility.

“I like to begin awareness talks with my ABCs of Art and Accessibility. Full inclusion means providing access for Artists, Administrators and Audience members; this happens by building Bridges, not Barriers, with Co-operation, Communication, and Creativity.”

Pamela Walker, artist, administrator and audience member

Provide anyone unable to attend training with training materials and keep them abreast of the organization's accessibility efforts. Offer training on a regular basis to accommodate newcomers and to provide a refresher on the basics and information about new services.

Components of an Effective Training Program

The following are eight key components that should be included in every effective training program or workshop.

1) The Organization's Commitment to Accessibility and Etiquette

Discuss the organization's commitment to providing superb service by treating all people with courtesy and attentiveness while complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and applicable state and local laws.

Offer general tips on courteous behavior and good customer service. People with disabilities themselves are the most effective in covering such issues, including:

- See the person, not the disability. Don't "talk down."
- Speak directly to the individual, not to a companion or an interpreter.
- Treat adults as adults. Be considerate. A person with a disability may take extra time to say or do things.
- Relax. Do not worry about using common expressions such as "See you later" or "I've got to run."

"Maybe it's high time that people with disabilities, the artists of the world, tell it like it is, about how our lives impact all of humanity, how we improve the fabric of society, how we contribute to our economy, how we are a part of our families and our communities."

John D. Kemp, lawyer and former CEO and President of VSA arts

2) Define “People with Disabilities”

Discuss what the word “disability” means and how people don’t always conform to stereotypes. Many disabilities are hidden, invisible and not easily detected. People with disabilities range from the person who has difficulty walking great distances to the person who uses a wheelchair; one who is blind and uses a guide dog to the person who cannot adjust quickly to changes in lighting conditions; someone who has age-related mild hearing loss to the person who is congenitally deaf.

3) Needs of Older Adults

While older individuals may not need specific assistance, they can benefit by others understanding their needs. Aspects of the organization and its facility may be frustrating for older people, such as:

- The distance one has to walk from the car or front door to one’s seat.
- Finding one’s way around a large and confusing building.
- Lack of a place to sit with armrests while waiting.
- Poorly lit areas or floor levels that change unexpectedly.



4) Language

Talk about the importance of language and its power to include or exclude. People with disabilities want to be viewed with respect and dignity like anyone else. Insist upon language that promotes inclusion. Equip staff and volunteers with appropriate “people first” language information.

Keep in mind that there are regional differences regarding acceptable use of language. Members of the cultural organization’s accessibility advisory committee can advise and talk about politically correct language in the community.

5) Communication

Recommend good communication practices such as the following:

- Give the individual your complete attention.
- Always introduce yourself by name and say that you work for the organization and in what capacity (e.g., staff, docent, volunteer, usher or tour guide).

- Always face the individual. Never carry on a conversation while standing behind someone or turn away from someone while speaking.
- Speak clearly and distinctly but do not exaggerate or shout.
- Give clear and concise directions.
- Be flexible with language. If the person does not understand, rephrase the statement using simpler words.



Usher Escorting Patron

6) Offering Assistance

Talk about the important responsibility of offering assistance. Never be afraid to ask someone, “May I assist you?” If the offer for assistance is accepted, ask the person, “How may I assist you?” or “What can I do to assist you?” Most people will appreciate the offer, while others may neither need nor want assistance. Nevertheless, the offer to assist is never wrong. Do not insist if help is refused.

If a person states a need, trust their explanation and respond respectfully. An individual’s safety and comfort are always important considerations.

Discuss with staff and volunteers what is appropriate in assisting people with disabilities. The law prescribes some of this and the organization’s policies should dictate the remainder.

For example, a theater might direct its front-of-house staff and volunteer ushers to follow specific guidelines in assisting patrons with disabilities, such as:

DO Hold or stabilize wheelchairs while patrons transfer to a conventional seat.

DO Push peoples’ wheelchairs to the restroom if requested.

DO Assist a patron in purchasing beverages or getting to a water fountain if requested.

DO Help people to be comfortable.

DON’T Lift or carry people.

DON’T Accompany them into the toilet area.

DON’T Feed or administer medication.

DON’T Do anything to jeopardize your own or patrons’ safety.

7) Describe and Demonstrate Services and Auxiliary Aids

Describe and demonstrate all available accommodations, including services and auxiliary aids. Never assume that staff, volunteers, ushers and docents know what services and accommodations are available or how they work. If the organization uses multiple facilities, be specific as to which accommodations are available (and where) in which facilities. Discuss not only what is provided, but what a patron or visitor with a disability may bring with them, such as different types of equipment and service animals.

8) How to Respond to Emergencies

Staff and volunteers should know the organization's procedures for evacuating the building and handling medical emergencies.

For example, a museum might direct its security staff and docents to follow specific guidelines during emergencies, such as:

- Do not make physical contact with any visitors, even if the intention is to calm them. They may find even solicitous physical contact frightening or disorienting.
- Be considerate of all individuals but do not allow inappropriate behavior.
- In the event of a medical emergency, injury or visible illness, call for trained medical personnel. Unless the situation is life threatening, do not attempt to render first aid and do not move the ill or injured person unless the environment is life threatening.
- Take necessary steps to accommodate medical personnel (i.e., clear theater aisle and turn on house lights so they may safely evacuate the person).
- Know where all accessible emergency exits are located and be prepared to evacuate people from the building calmly and safely.

Producing an Accessibility Conference or Workshop

With regard to arts and humanities service organizations, access issues should become an integral agenda item of your conferences, workshops, seminars and orientations. For example, include someone with a disability to discuss: access issues on an audience development panel, universal design on a facilities panel or audio description in a media presentation. Having cultural administrators who conduct accessible programs present their success stories is highly effective. Presenters should include the planning process, funding, marketing as well as any problems and successes they experienced.

Think about what an accessibility workshop at a conference should include:

- The focus of all access education should be inclusion: integrating older adults and people with disabilities into the cultural mainstream for full and equal participation.
- The workshop/conference itself should be a model of an accessible meeting.
- Although the meeting may be condensed into a one-day workshop, these activities should be presented over a two-day period for best results.

The agenda for a conference or workshop on accessibility should be comprehensive. The following is a sample agenda:

- 1) Opening Remarks (10 minutes) by a key member of your organization (director, chairman, board member).
- 2) Opening Panel (45 minutes) chaired by board member:
“Access from the Artists’ or Humanities Scholars’ and/or Cultural Administrators’ Perspective”
At least three panelists with disabilities and older adults who are artists, scholars or administrators of a cultural organization:
 - What the arts or the humanities mean to them.
 - Examples of their personal experiences in gaining access to the humanities or arts (both positive and negative experiences).
 - Their advice to cultural administrators on how to better serve people with their particular needs.
- 3) Panel (45 minutes)
“The Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504”
 - A speaker (i.e., lawyer) presents an overview of the laws translated into how they apply to cultural groups, including rented/donated space, touring and other relevant subjects. (15-20 minutes)
 - A cultural administrator discusses his/her organization’s access policies and grievance procedures and (if applicable) experience in resolving a grievance or formal complaint. (10 minutes)
 - Questions and answers. (15 minutes)
- 4) Speakers at Luncheon and Dinner (20 to 30 minutes for each presentation)
One speaker per meal who may be an artist, humanities scholar, head of a cultural organization or a board member who is actively engaged in access issues; or a performance by professional artist(s) with disabilities.

5) Concurrent panel sessions (1-1/2 hours for each concurrent segment; 2 to 4 panels for each time-slot)

The number, topics covered and frequency of panels will depend on the length of your conference. Each panel should include no more than three speakers and at least one panelist with a disability. Question and discussion time must also be included in each session. Suggested topics are:

- “Making Access a Reality”: discussion of policy, access advisory committee, public affairs and marketing issues.
- “Education and Outreach”: model programs that reach and include people with various disabilities.
- “Access: It’s More than a Ramp”: designing for increased access through the self-evaluation process.
- “Universal Design”: the concept of going beyond minimum standards and making access features an integral part of all design, including programs and facilities.
- “Adapting Existing Facilities and Historic Preservation Issues.”
- “How to Hold an Access Training Workshop.”
- “Technologies that Advance Accessibility” (i.e., audio description, captioning, assistive listening systems).
- “Resources for Change”: funding opportunities (i.e., Community Development Block Grants) and organizations that provide technical assistance on accessibility (i.e., Independent Living Centers, VSA arts).

6) Closing Session “Planning for the Future” (one hour)

In the closing session, participants discuss “where do we go from here,” and “what is needed to do it?” This valuable session will help your organization identify next steps, and ways that you may work together to advance access in your community.

RESOURCES

Examples of Training Tools

“Be Yourself. Say Hello!”

by Eleanor Rubin and Maureen Albano
Division of Education and Public Programs
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Avenue of the Arts
465 Huntington Avenue
Boston, MA 02115-5523
(617) 369-3302 voice
(617) 267-9703 TTY
www.mfa.org

“Train Your Staff”

This is a component of a Web-based accessibility guide called
“A Step By Step Guide To Accessible Arts In California”.
National Arts and Disability Center
Tarjan Center for Developmental Disabilities
300 UCLA Medical Plaza Suite #3310
Los Angeles, CA 90095-6967
(310) 794-1141 voice
(310) 794-1143 fax
<http://nadc.ucla.edu/10steps.htm#7>

“Disability Etiquette Handbook”

The City of San Antonio, Texas Planning Department and the Disability
Advisory Committee have prepared this Disability Etiquette Handbook to
enhance opportunities for persons with disabilities to pursue their
careers and independent lifestyles. It can be downloaded at:
www.ci.sat.tx.us/planning/disability_handbook/disability_handbook.asp?res=1024&ver=true

“Ten Commandments of Etiquette for Communicating with People with Disabilities”

UCP has numerous useful fact sheets on a variety of different
topics that could be used for training.
UCP National (aka United Cerebral Palsy)
1660 L Street, NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 776-0406 voice
(202) 973-7197 TTY
(202) 776-0414 fax
(800) 872-5827 voice
webmaster@ucp.org
www.ucpa.org/ucp_generalsub.cfm/1/6573

“Disability Etiquette Tips”

National Organization on Disability

910 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Suite 600

Washington, DC 20006

(202) 293-5960 Voice

(202) 293-7999 Fax

(202) 293-5968 TTY

<http://www.nod.org/content.cfm?id=152>