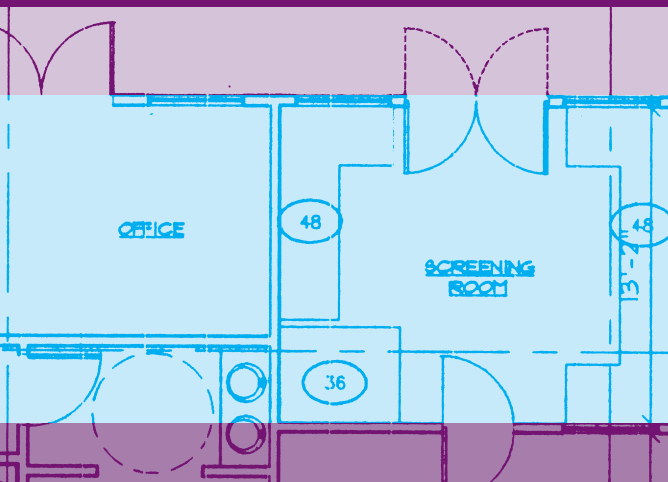


# Arts Access *made easy:*

Successful Strategies from the Award of Excellence in Arts Access





“A teenage girl... is sitting across the table (in an art class) from this guy named Joe, who’s blind. He can’t see anything, and he says ‘*Pass the blue paint.*’ And she says, ‘*How do you know what blue paint is?!*’ And he says ‘Blue like the sky, blue like the water. You don’t have to see **blue** to *know* what **blue** is.’”

Dwight Graves, from *The Journey to Here*





If we need proof that awareness of arts access is on the rise, we need only look at the number of venues that applied for this award. Three times as many arts organizations submitted their access programs for consideration this year—a sign that everyone is learning how important it is to reach out to the more than 59 million people with disabilities in the United States.

Arts organizations recognize that by providing accessibility services they expand their audience. People with disabilities are not a small fringe group in your community—they are an integral part of every community.

By including everyone in the design, your programs become more relevant and engaging. If our arts define us, then so does our audience. Define yours as broadly as you can. The *average* attendee does not exist. We're all different, and our needs vary. Access strives to meet the needs of everyone in your community.

For arts venues just beginning their access efforts, let the excellence of this year's awardees guide and motivate you. And let this booklet serve as an introduction to the network of resources open to you as you launch your own programs.

Enjoy!

**Soula Antoniou**

President

VSA arts





**P**roviding physical access for your visitors is not enough anymore, but it is a great beginning. Now, the goal is to create events that meet the specific needs of people with disabilities and that make them feel welcome and involved. Making adaptations in the presentation of art exhibits, theatrical performances, activities, and workshops that enable people with and without disabilities to have the same opportunity to richly experience these events, this is access and inclusion.

Through thoughtful planning, organizations can create full access to the arts. Access is created when people of diverse abilities have an equal opportunity to attend, participate in, and enjoy arts programming. An organization can contribute to access by being sensitive and responsive to the needs of people with disabilities through—

- The *design* and *implementation* of a program;
- The *guidelines* and *policies* in place to support the development and implementation of its programs;
- The *printed materials* created to promote the program;
- The means through which the program is *communicated to the public*; and
- The *physical design* of the facility used to implement the program.



## THE PATH TO ACCESS

Arts access allows community access. It's that simple. If you want to reach the largest possible audience, then you need to make your programs available to them. All people must be able to attend your arts events, and to meaningfully experience them.

Don't let arts access become a daunting task. Break it down into manageable projects, especially if you are just starting your access efforts. You may designate an access coordinator, but full access requires a team effort. True access requires much community outreach, and it can even require architectural renovations. The simplest and cheapest solutions, however, are frequently the most powerful. Let's get to the basics.

### Ten Surefire Ways to Achieve Arts Access

**1. Approach Access as a Process.** The first step is one of attitude. Don't think you'll one day be finished with your access responsibilities. Arts access is an ongoing process, and it's as fundamental to your organization as the arts events you produce. (Why? Because it's about creating an audience, and art isn't art without an audience.)

Make arts access part of the fabric of your organization. Just as you never stop producing new events, exhibits, and programs, you'll find endless ways to include the greatest possible audience.

**2. Make Access Somebody's Job.** At every arts institution, there should be a person who has the specific responsibility of arts access. A full-time position is rarely allocated. This coordinator needs to juggle this role with several other duties, which is why number three is so vital.

## WHAT IS ARTS *access*?

Arts access is achieved when people with and without disabilities have the same opportunity to experience the arts, whether they are audience members, artists, or patrons.

### Arts Access manifests itself in many ways:

Physical accommodations, such as seating for people using wheelchairs and Braille signage

Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs)

Infrared Listening Systems

ASL interpreters

Open Captioning

Audio Description

Touch Tours

TTY phones

Inclusive Arts Education Programs



## BUILDING BLOCKS OF *accessibility*

**Ask** patrons and involve people with disabilities in your planning.

**State** your commitment to access in your mission and press materials.

**Designate** an accessibility coordinator.

**Obtain** input from people with disabilities.

**Train** all staff on accessibility and disability awareness.

**Conduct** a review/evaluation of facilities and programs to identify existing barriers.

**Implement** short- and long-term plans.

**Establish** a way for feedback and constructive criticism to be heard.

**Continue** to review your progress.

**3. Build Relationships.** No matter how small your city, there are organizations out there that represent people with disabilities (see list, page 7). Introduce yourself and your arts institution to these groups, and to leaders in these communities. Schedule a meeting. Everyone has to begin somewhere, so don't be afraid to ask questions. Soak up what they have to say. What are their needs? What do they want? How can you make your theatre or museum more accessible to their groups?

They can make your job easier. Create an accessibility committee made up of these representatives and key staff at your organization. The dialogue at these committee meetings will help you establish access priorities for your venue. Find out what you're doing right, and what needs improvement. Are assistive listening devices the biggest priority, or an accessible bathroom on the second floor? How many people have used the TTY phone line to purchase tickets? Does your programming

include the creative works of people with disabilities? Who should receive brochures promoting upcoming sensory tours?

**4. Evaluate What You've Got.** To know what you need, examine what you've got. What physical alterations do you need to make at your facility? Who on the staff needs sensitivity training? (Everyone who works with the public needs it, even the security guards.) Ask your new accessibility committee to help conduct the evaluations and the training sessions. Use the "People First" guide in the back of this booklet as a starting point for your staff.

**5. Take Advantage of Free Resources.** Only at number five and you're already overwhelmed? Don't be—it's a process done in baby steps. Free help and resources exist at every level. For instance, just do an Internet search on "cultural access" to find a wealth of online resources.



**6. Make Goals You Can Achieve.** Don't aim to rebuild your theatre to adhere to the principles of Universal Design if you are working with a small budget and no staff. Start with what's doable—so if you're a small-town theatre, maybe that's just to include an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter or volunteer audio describer at one performance. Arts access isn't an all-or-nothing proposition, but it's easy to get discouraged when you don't think you have the financial resources or manpower to make changes. Some changes don't cost a thing, like building relationships (number 3). Remember that it's better to do something small than nothing at all.

**7. Market to Community.** After actually incorporating arts access into your venue, this is the most important thing you can do. Access is useless if the people who can use it don't know about it. Create an access statement that clearly describes what you do offer and your commitment to include all people at your institution. Produce

informative brochures to mail to the senior centers, schools, and organizations that work with people with disabilities. Advertise your access offerings in the publications read by these populations (which are often the same publications read by the general public). Use your newly developed relationships in the disability community to get the word out. Include the Graphic Arts Guild symbols for accessibility in all of your printed materials. Make sure there is sufficient and clear signage in your arts venue that publicize the accessibility options available. Even if your arts access budget is tiny, dedicate some funds to marketing your adaptations.

**8. Consider Both Sides of the Stage.** Arts access isn't just about the audience. People with disabilities sing, dance, act, paint, direct, play instruments, choreograph, do set design, produce, write, sculpt... everything artists do. And their work needs to be staged, performed, and exhibited. If you're renovating your physical space to







## Partner Potential

To reach people with disabilities, target groups like these in your community:

Senior Centers

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)

Community Centers

Public Schools

Hospitals and Rehabilitation Hospitals

Health Care Providers (i.e., a poster in an audiologist's office will probably be seen by many people with hearing loss)

Vocational Rehabilitation Centers

Independent Living Centers

Parent Information Centers

Human Service Agencies

State Arts Councils

adhere to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) codes, make sure the backstage area is accessible. If you're deciding which artists to exhibit in your gallery next year, consider the work of artists with disabilities as well. Seek out the works of playwrights and musicians with disabilities. When holding auditions, include aspiring actors who have disabilities (and don't just consider them for roles in *The Miracle Worker*!)

**9. Accept Criticism.** Establish a grievance process where people can lodge complaints. Ask for feedback, and bravely receive it. Yes, it sounds like an invitation to a headache, but if the disability community has an easy way to let you know what's not working (i.e., "*Why are there no ASL interpreters at matinees?*"), you will have an easy way to improve on the adaptations you implement. Besides, you might occasionally get a compliment, and that makes all the complaining worthwhile.

**10. Build on What You Create.** Never stop creating access. Keep coming up with new ideas and innovations. Remember, it's a process. When you receive feedback from people with disabilities, put it to use. Let the advisory committee you create (see number 3) be a breeding ground for new ideas and new goals for your institution.



## IT ISN'T EASY BEING AN ARTS ACCESS COORDINATOR

### Common Questions and Complaints

**Where do I begin? Where do I buy a TTY phone, and how much does it cost? Who can add Braille to my signage? How do you find the ALDs, the Infrared devices, etc.?**

It's easier than you'd think, and almost all of it can be found on the Web.

Go to [www.nadc.ucla.edu/ACCESSIBLESERVICES&PRODUCTS.htm](http://www.nadc.ucla.edu/ACCESSIBLESERVICES&PRODUCTS.htm), the National Arts and Disability Center's Web site at [www.nadc.ucla.edu](http://www.nadc.ucla.edu) for an informative resource list of every type of assistive technology.

You can also contact your local independent living center or office for students with disabilities in your nearby university or college to locate assistive listening, audio description, Braille, captioning, and sign language interpreters in your community. See a nationwide directory at of independent living centers [www.virtualcil.net/cils/](http://www.virtualcil.net/cils/)

### How do I afford this?

Fear not, funding sources for your accessible programs do exist. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) offers Community Development Block Grant Programs that provide funds to state, county, and city governments for projects of private and public organizations for barrier removal in cultural facilities and programs. Call the local office of HUD, your state arts council, or your state social services agency, and be prepared for a certain amount of bureaucratic complexity.

Some other possibilities:

- The NEC Foundation of America gives grants that apply assistive technology for people with disabilities, [www.nec.com](http://www.nec.com)
- The Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation funds projects using technology geared toward young people. [www.meaf.org](http://www.meaf.org)

## FIVE things you can do that DON'T *COST* additional MONEY

1. Build an advisory committee, and create an access statement that clearly describes what you do.
2. Seek out work by artists with disabilities.
3. Call other cultural organizations with strong access programs.
4. Learn how to use the relay system, a phone service that enables people who are deaf or hard of hearing to use a regular telephone.
5. Invite employees with disabilities within your institution to share their experiences.





- The Foundation Center provides resources on private and corporate foundations. [www.fdncenter.org](http://www.fdncenter.org)
- The Grantsmanship Center offers resources to nonprofit organizations through the Whole Nonprofit Catalog. [www.tgci.com](http://www.tgci.com)

### How do I find the right audience for my accessible services?

In your city, organizations exist that represent the communities that will benefit from your services. See some examples on page 7.

Don't be afraid to admit that you're new to access. Most of these groups are happy that you're interested in including them. Reach out to these organizations, and you'll find an audience. Invite representatives to join your advisory committee. Make sure any marketing materials you create get in the hands of the people at these organizations. Schedule events that coincide with their programs. If you build strong

relationships, you'll soon see that your arts access efforts are bringing in a new audience to your venue.

### Where can I get the access symbols?

The universal graphic symbols that represent the varying levels of accessibility are free to use. Download them from the Web site of the Graphic Arts Guild at [www.gag.org/resources/das.php](http://www.gag.org/resources/das.php)



You can also receive the symbols on a computer disk for PC or Mac or as camera-ready slicks. Contact the Graphic Artists Guild at (212) 791-3400. The cost is \$12.95 plus \$3.00 shipping and handling.



**We are already running several programs that are very successful. Do I have to scrap them completely simply because they aren't "accessible"?**

Strive to be inclusive. Reach out to potential audiences or participants with disabilities, and make accommodations for them in your program. Accommodations range from installing a ramp at your entrance to bringing an ASL interpreter to your workshop. Inclusive arts education programs expose all the participants to learning opportunities on several levels. When people with and without disabilities work together, especially in a creative environment, everyone benefits.

## **SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES IN ARTS ACCESS**

### **VSA arts/MetLife Foundation Award of Excellence in Arts Access Recipients, 2003**

This year's awardees demonstrate four different creative, responsive approaches to arts access. The recipients also represent the

spectrum of budgets—from a \$10 million renovation by Boston's Wang Center to the modest annual operating budget of Arizona's Third Street Company/Arts for All, Inc. Despite their differences, all four awardees have two things in common: a deep, ongoing commitment to arts access, and strong relationships with the disability community in their locations.

### **Paper Mill Playhouse, Milburn, New Jersey Open Captioning Project**

As the state theatre of New Jersey, the Paper Mill Playhouse is a nationally recognized theatre that stages a broad spectrum of musicals and plays. The Paper Mill Playhouse leads by providing access services to the arts patrons of New Jersey with well-developed programs in barrier-free design; services for people who are Deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or visually impaired; and discounted tickets. MetLife and VSA arts awarded the Paper Mill Playhouse for its Open Captioning program.

## **Marketing: *The Secret Weapon***

The Papermill Playhouse maximized the impact of its new access service by hiring a manager of outreach and access. Even the best program is a wasted investment without the proper audience. Marketing to the proper public is equal in importance to implementing an effective arts access program. The manager works with the theatre's marketing department to create targeted campaigns to reach people who will make use of their services.

- The captioning services are target-marketed via direct mail twice a year.

- *Theatre for Everyone* is a brochure outlining all of the Paper Mill's access services. The brochure is distributed at the theatre and is sent via direct mail to ticketbuyers.

- All theatre and educational marketing materials include the Graphic Arts Guild's access symbols (see page 9).

- The Paper Mill uses its Web site, [www.papermill.org](http://www.papermill.org), to describe all of its access programs in detail.



An architectural drawing of a theater interior, showing a stage, audience seating, and architectural details like columns and a balcony. A blue rectangular text box is overlaid on the left side of the image.

## What is the *VSA arts / MetLife Foundation* Award of Excellence in Arts Access?

For three years, *VSA arts* has presented arts organizations who have established long-range accessibility goals with a \$5,000 cash award for specific programs through the generous support of the MetLife Foundation. Previous award winners include Bethesda Academy for Performing Arts, Bethesda, MD; Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, Ohio; Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities, Arvada, Colorado; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Guthrie Theater, Minneapolis, MN; Fargo-Moorhead Community Theatre, Fargo, ND; Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; and Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles Theatre Center, Los Angeles, CA.

### **Winning Access: Open Captioning**

Open Captioning (OC) allows full access for patrons with profound hearing loss who only partially benefit from infrared listening systems or American Sign Language (ASL). A large digital screen on the left side of the auditorium projects dialogue as the action occurs onstage. OC is offered for two performances of each musical and one performance of each play. Upon request, the Papermill Playhouse will provide OC for children's theatre and other events.

Through ticket sales, the theatre measures the success of its access programs. The Papermill Playhouse also continually forges partnerships with local organizations, leaders, and patrons to gather feedback about the effectiveness of existing accommodations and opportunities for improvements.

### **Wang Center for the Performing Arts, Boston, Massachusetts**

#### **A Commitment to Accessibility**

The Wang Center, which includes the Wang and Shubert Theatres, is New England's largest cultural venue, staging ballets, operas, Broadway shows, classical and popular music, classic films, and international dance. The Wang Center is a true example of a performing arts center that has achieved arts access. With a generous budget and an ambitious plan, the center has enabled individuals who have physical or developmental disabilities or who are Deaf or hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired to experience the arts at their facilities. Through adaptations to their physical surroundings, staff training, and adjustments in their ticketing and audience policies, they have expanded their audience to include the disability community. They have also put leaders with disabilities at the center of their planning, serving as a bridge between



the center and the disability community in the Boston area.

### The First Building Block

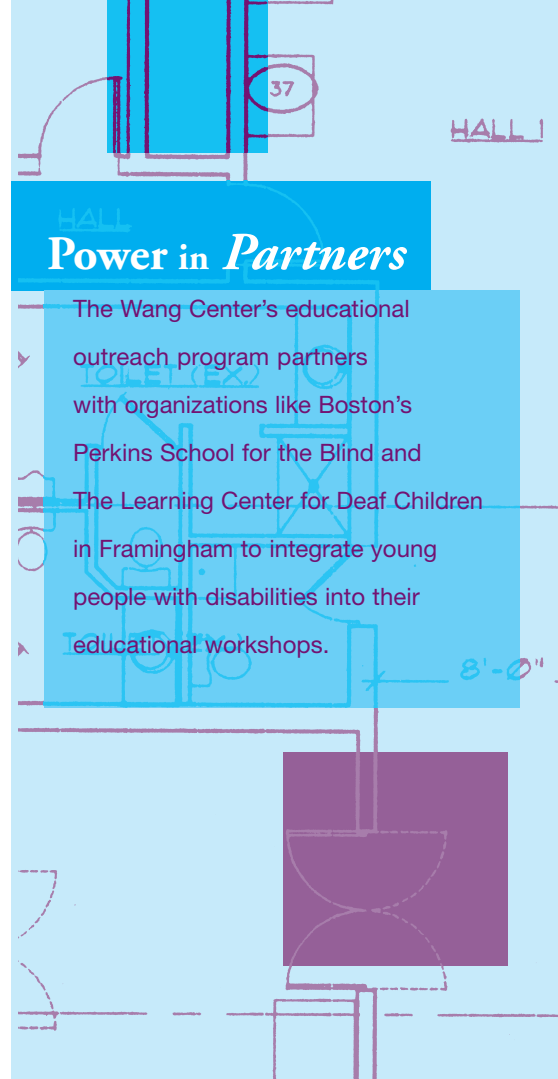
The Wang and Shubert Theatres exemplify all the components of a physically accessible performing arts venue. From basics like their barrier-free drop-off and entrance area, free assistive listening devices, accessible restrooms and drinking fountains to features available at only the most progressive venues, including:

- Wheelchair lifts backstage that provide access to all backstage areas and the orchestra pit;
- A TTY pay phone in the main lobby;
- Large-print programs for every performance; and
- Plenty of armless seats for patrons transferring from wheelchairs, and seating in the front for patrons with visual disabilities.

The \$10 million renovation of the Wang and Shubert Theatres was begun in 1989. The Wang Center hired a consulting firm to conduct a full evaluation of the physical establishment and to bring their facilities into ADA compliance. Early on, the Wang Center established a Diversity Access Committee of the Board of Trustees to spearhead the Center's transformation. In addition, the Center hosts advisory boards comprised of members of the community, to suggest access adaptations. They retain the Cultural Access Consortium (CAC) as their "access consultant" to bridge the Center with the Deaf and blind communities. (For more about the CAC, visit their Web site at [www.cac.org](http://www.cac.org).)

### The Second Layer—Access to What Wang Offers

For people who are hard of hearing, Wang uses three assistive techniques—ASL interpretation, sound plus assistive listening/FM infrared, and Open Captioning. The theatre's advisory board advises the theaters on which performances they



## Power in *Partners*

- The Wang Center's educational outreach program partners with organizations like Boston's Perkins School for the Blind and
- The Learning Center for Deaf Children in Framingham to integrate young people with disabilities into their educational workshops.





## To MARKET, *to market*

The Wang Center publishes an access guide for their patrons.

- It outlines all of the Center's accessibility services, and is updated regularly.
- It is printed in Braille for patrons who are blind or have visual disabilities.
- Wang obtains mailing lists from *VSA arts of Massachusetts* and an access consultant to continually update their mailing lists and e-mail listservs with individuals who may be interested in accessible performances.
- Advertisements in key publications and press releases about accessible performances also promote the Center's work.

perceive will be of interest to the Deaf community. ASL volunteers are available at every performance to ensure convenience for patrons who are Deaf. Patrons with visual disabilities may opt for audio-description at selected performances. The Wang Center even goes one step further and loans out their audio description system to other Boston-based arts organizations.

Seats in the first few rows of the Wang and Shubert Theatres are usually priced at \$70. Wang offers these seats at half-price to all patrons who are Deaf or hard of hearing since these are the most suitable seats for viewing interpreters. Four seats are available in the front rows at each performance for attendees with low vision. All tickets for volunteer ushers and interpreters are free.

### The Cultural Shift

The leaders of Wang's access plan were wise to realize early on that the key to success included a change in the institution's policy and culture. Access awareness training

is given to all staff and trustees. Training sessions are based upon the distinct functions of the staff—be they box office, ushers, educational staff, or trustees. Training is led by their Cultural Access Consortium representatives and leaders from the blind and Deaf communities share relevant information specific to the needs of the attendees.

Wang maintains the quality of its access programs by continuously soliciting the opinions of the disability community. Feedback is gathered through post-show discussions, e-mail evaluations, and written letters from participants, interpreters, and audio describers.

### **The Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico** **The Spectrum Program: Creativity on a Budget**

With a modest budget, Santa Fe's Museum of International Folk Art (MOIFA) has created an effective program to bring people



with disabilities in to see the exhibits and experience the creative process. In the Spectrum program, people with disabilities engage in the arts themselves—a hands-on experience that deepens the meaning of arts access.

MOIFA, one of the five institutes of the Museum of New Mexico system, collects, preserves, and presents material folk culture from around the world. The Museum also promotes the study of folk culture, including music, drama, dance, and the verbal arts. An active commitment to arts access is in keeping with the Museum's commitment to promote international goodwill and global understanding.

### **Collaboration for Success**

MOIFA collaborated with *VSA arts of New Mexico (VSANM)* and the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) to create Spectrum, an arts-based program for adults and youth with physical and mental disabilities. The goal is to integrate this specific audience into the overall

audience by providing them with a multi-sensory experience. The arts-based program integrates the resources of all three organizations. For instance, students working with adults with cognitive disabilities at Santa Fe's Southwestern College are given valuable training via this program by their volunteer work with the participants. (And MOIFA benefits by getting free assistance.) The Spectrum program also sponsors training in working with people with special needs for professionals, museum docents, and community members.

The program combines exhibitions with hands-on arts experiences led by professional educators and artists. Trained docents who are retired art therapists or who are specifically trained in working with adults and youth with disabilities lead the program.

The expense of a program like Spectrum is minimal because it does not involve the investment in new technology,

## *A broad Spectrum* *examples of the Spectrum* *experience include:*

- A tour of an exhibition of textiles from around the world followed by a lesson on West African drumming and rhythms;
- A tour of a ceramics exhibition followed by a hands-on clay activity; or
- A tour of the Hispanic folk art Heritage Wing followed by hands-on tinwork, weaving, or dancing.





## *All for all at Arts for All, Inc.*

- Daily afterschool classes in music, drama, dance, visual arts, and sign language that bring together children with and without disabilities from a variety of socioeconomic levels;
- Trilingual (English, Spanish, and ASL) performances at assemblies in public schools throughout Arizona and New Mexico;
- Performances at major community theatres in the area, featuring people of all ages and abilities;
- Monthly workshops with local artists—weekend intensives focusing on a particular interest, such as songwriting, storytelling, or dance;

*continued on page 16*

like an Infrared listening system, or the employment of ASL interpreters. The commitment of specially trained educators and program leaders makes the experience accessible, and staff costs are kept to a minimum thanks in part to the generosity of its participants. The staff and student aides also work for very little, and the guest artists are given a modest honoraria for their efforts.

At the start of each year, a group of partners from the community meets to discuss the content of each Spectrum session. To gather feedback, MOIFA asks participants to complete written evaluation forms after each session.

### **Getting the Word out**

Since the Spectrum program itself is a partnership with VSANM and NAMI, MOIFA is already one step ahead in reaching their intended audience. An outreach educator on staff at MOIFA works with additional organizations in and around Santa Fe to recruit participants and

group leaders. To further market Spectrum, MOIFA also sends a brochure to schools and groups in the area that also take part in the Museum's Folk Art to Go program.

### **Arts for All, Inc./Third St. Ensemble Company, Tucson, Arizona Creating Opportunity with the Arts**

The primary focus of Tucson's Third St. Ensemble Company/Arts for All, Inc. is to expose young people with disabilities to the arts. The company uses the performing arts to encourage personal growth and brings a diverse group of Tucson's young people together in a creative and productive setting.

Initially begun as an afterschool program, Arts for All, Inc. presents an ambitious array of inclusive classes, training workshops, performances, and even social events. Each year, one full-length production is performed in Tucson, and sometimes also staged nationally and internationally.

Arts for All, Inc., is the rare program that is exclusively oriented toward people with



disabilities, but their methods can serve as a springboard to brainstorm innovative ideas in mainstream arts venues.

At inclusive summer and winter arts camps, counselors receive accessibility training and reach out to individual students by incorporating wheelchair dance or creating adaptive resources for the visual arts. By working together, children become accepting of disabilities, and come away from the experience with a deeper understanding of themselves and the value of diversity.

**Telling the Public About Arts for All, Inc.** The entire budget of Arts for All Inc. is dedicated to their accessibility program, since access encompasses the entire mission of the Third St. Ensemble Company. This allows their marketing plan to be extensive. News about auditions, programs, and performances are publicized in press releases, postcards, and flyers sent to public schools, radio stations, newspapers and arts and social service agencies. Arts for All, Inc.

also has an embosser to print its own Braille materials, and everything is translated into Spanish by staff.

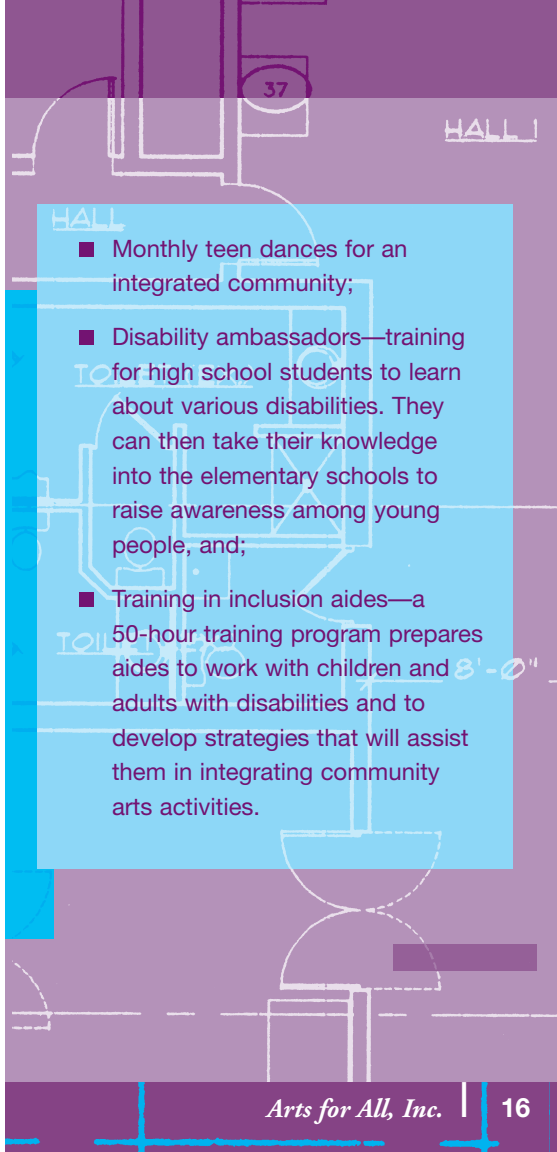
### Other Winning Ideas

Some standouts from the runners-up:

Project 3D at the **Music Hall in Portsmouth**, New Hampshire, uses audio description to bring live dance and theatre to individuals who are blind or have low vision. The project includes a workshop day to introduce people in the New Hampshire area to audio description. [www.themusichall.org](http://www.themusichall.org)

The ASL interpreters at the **Wild Swan Theatre** in Ann Arbor, Michigan, are also actors who work with the speaking cast to heighten the ASL service and integrate it meaningfully into the performance. Wild Swan presents more ASL interpreted performances for young people than any other theatre in the country. [www.comnet.org/wildswan](http://www.comnet.org/wildswan)

The **Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art** in Kansas City, Missouri, collaborates

- 
- Monthly teen dances for an integrated community;
  - Disability ambassadors—training for high school students to learn about various disabilities. They can then take their knowledge into the elementary schools to raise awareness among young people, and;
  - Training in inclusion aides—a 50-hour training program prepares aides to work with children and adults with disabilities and to develop strategies that will assist them in integrating community arts activities.





## Why *include* ALL?

The creative arts (music, theatre, visual art, sculpture, dance, movement, writing) provide a place where diversity and originality are highly valued.

The creative process leads us to better understand ourselves and one another, thereby breaking down personal and societal barriers. For this reason, inclusive classes in the arts offer people a unique opportunity to interact.

directly with the University of Kansas Medical Center's Institute for Child Development to offer the ArtReach Program. ArtReach provides customized art-making workshops at the Museum for the Institute's outpatients, friends, and family. [www.kemperart.org](http://www.kemperart.org)

Sensory seminars are one of the most innovative ways that the **McCarter Theatre Center for the Performing Arts** in Princeton, New Jersey, creates access to their performances. Before each audio described performance, patrons with disabilities are given the opportunity to walk through the set pieces, feel the costume textures, and handle key props. [www.mccarter.org](http://www.mccarter.org)

San Francisco's **Yerba Buena Center for the Arts** started a partnership with D.E.A.F. Media, Inc. six years ago. Artists who are Deaf are included in the exhibit schedule of the center, and access salons are held four times a year to bring lectures, workshops, film screenings

and performances to San Francisco's community of people who are Deaf or hard of hearing. [www.yerbabuenaarts.org](http://www.yerbabuenaarts.org)

**The Keshet Dance Company** in Albuquerque, New Mexico, strives to break the stereotype of who can dance and what a dancer looks like with their Mixed Ability Program that includes people with disabilities. Occupational and physical therapists and trained volunteers work with the dance instructors to ensure that everyone in the class has a meaningful experience. [www.keshetdance.org](http://www.keshetdance.org)



## SPEAKING WITH AWARENESS

### “People-First” Language

It seems so simple. Don’t think of the disability, think of the person. Think of the people first, and disability awareness will come quite naturally. But to help you along, here are two excerpts from *Access and Opportunities: A Guide to Disability Awareness*, a publication written and distributed by *VSA arts*.

Language shapes the way those around us speak and act toward one another and conveys the respect we have for others. The use of appropriate language about people with disabilities can be an important tool in building a community that accepts all people.

Appropriate language is both sensitive and accurate. *VSA arts* promotes the use of “people-first” language—language that puts the focus on the individual, rather than on a disability. People-first language helps us remember that people are unique individuals

and that their abilities or disabilities are only part of who they are.

### Suggestions to Improve Access and Positive Interactions

Avoid euphemisms such as “physically challenged,” “differently abled,” or “handi-capable.” Many disability groups object to these phrases because they are considered condescending and reinforce the idea that disabilities cannot be spoken of in an upfront and direct manner.

Think of it this way: you wouldn’t call a friend with cancer “your cancerous friend,” so why would you call a friend who is Deaf “your Deaf friend”?

Do not sensationalize a disability by using terms such as “afflicted with,” “suffers from,” or “crippled with.” These expressions are considered offensive and inaccurate to people with disabilities.

When referring to people who use wheelchairs, avoid terms such as “wheelchair







## This is NOT the *only* booklet you NEED.

The National Endowment for the Arts and the American Association of Museums can help you with arts access. Their books and booklets include:

- **An Arts Accessibility Checklist** that outlines major access accommodations to assist organizations in making their facilities and programs fully accessible. Contact your state arts council or the NEA office directly for a copy, (202) 682-5532 or [www.nea.gov](http://www.nea.gov)
- **Everyone's Welcome: The ADA & Museums**, shows how to make collections fully accessible and is \$25 for members. Order from the American Association of Museums Bookstore, (202) 289-9127.

*continued on page 20*

bound” or “confined to a wheelchair.” Wheelchairs do not confine people with disabilities — they provide freedom of movement to assist them in traveling throughout the community.

When writing or speaking about people with disabilities, emphasize abilities rather than limitations, focusing on a person’s accomplishments, creative talents, or skills. This does not mean avoiding mention of a person’s disability, but doing so in a respectful manner and only when relevant to the situation.

### Basic Rules for Disability Awareness People First! Affirmative Phrases

- **Person with a disability**
- **Person who is blind; person with a visual impairment**
- **Person who is Deaf; person who is hard of hearing**
- **Person with a mental illness**
- **Person with mental retardation**
- **Person who uses a wheelchair**
- **Person with a physical disability; person with a mobility impairment**



## Ten Commandments of Etiquette For Communicating with Persons with Disabilities

1. When talking with a person with a disability, speak directly to that person rather than through a companion or sign language interpreter.
2. When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands. (Shaking hands with the left hand is an acceptable greeting.)
3. When meeting a person with a visual impairment, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.
4. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions.

5. Treat adults as adults. Address people who have disabilities by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to all others. (Never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.)

6. Leaning or hanging on a person's wheelchair is similar to leaning or hanging on a person and is generally considered annoying. The chair is part of the personal body space of the person who uses it.

7. Listen attentively when you're talking with a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for the person to finish, rather than correcting or speaking for the person. If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod, or a shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond. The response will clue in and guide your understanding.

■ The National Endowment for the Arts Web site is a strong resource too. Visit their accessibility pages at [www.nea.gov](http://www.nea.gov) and click on Accessibility.

■ *Fundamentals of Arts Management*, includes a chapter on arts access that includes an extensive list of organizations, with their Web sites and addresses. It costs about \$50 and is available through the Arts Extension Service of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, [www.umass.edu/aes](http://www.umass.edu/aes).



SANDY: Summer lovin'!  
Happened so fast.  
DANNY: Met a girl!

8. When speaking with a person in a wheelchair or a person who uses crutches, place yourself at eye level in front of the person to facilitate the conversation.

9. To get the attention of a person who is Deaf or hard of hearing, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly, and expressively to determine if the person can read your lips. Not all people who are hard of hearing can lip-read. For those that do not lip-read, be sensitive to their needs by placing yourself so that you face the light source and keep hands, cigarettes, and food away from your mouth while speaking.

10. Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions such as "See you later." or "Did you hear about that?" that seem to relate to a person's disability.

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## MetLife Foundation

**VSA arts** is an international nonprofit organization founded in 1974 by Jean Kennedy Smith to promote education and lifelong learning opportunities in the arts for people with disabilities. Nearly five million people participate in **VSA arts** programs annually through a network of affiliate organizations across the nation and in more than 60 countries. To learn more about **VSA arts**, please visit [www.vsarts.org](http://www.vsarts.org).

**MetLife Foundation** was established by **MetLife** to support various educational, health, civic and cultural organizations across the country. Recognizing the arts' contribution to the health, vitality and development of our communities, the Foundation is committed to increasing access to the arts and promoting diversity and inclusion. For more information about **MetLife Foundation**, please visit [www.metlife.org](http://www.metlife.org).





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Alternative formats of this publication are available upon request.

The contents of this book were developed under a grant from the **US Department of Education**. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the **Department of Education**, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

