



NORTH DAKOTA COUNCIL ON THE ARTS

Arts Access Made Easy

VSA arts

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.

Providing Full Access to the Arts

Providing 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.

Providing Full Access to the Arts

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.

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

Path to Success

Arts access allows community access. 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.

10 Ways to Achieve Arts Access

1. ***Approach Access as a Process.*** The first step is one of attitude.
2. ***Make Access Somebody's Job.*** At every arts institution, there should be a person who has the specific responsibility of arts access.
3. ***Build Relationships.*** No matter how small your city, there are organizations out there that represent people with disabilities.
4. ***Evaluate What You've Got.*** To know what you need, examine what you've got.
5. ***Take Advantage of Free Resources.*** Free help and resources exist at every level.

10 Ways to Achieve Arts Access

6. *Make Goals You Can Achieve.* Don't aim to rebuild your theatre, start with what's doable.

7. *Market to Community.* After actually incorporating arts access into your venue, this is the most important thing you can do.

8. *Consider Both Sides of the Stage.* Arts access isn't just about the audience. People with disabilities can do everything artists do.

9. *Accept Criticism.* Establish a grievance process where people can lodge complaints. Ask for feedback, and bravely receive it.

10. *Build on What You Create.* Never stop creating access. Keep coming up with new ideas and innovations. Remember, it's a process.

5 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.

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

Common Questions

- ▶ **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.
- ▶ **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. (*refer to previous slide with Partner Potential*)
- ▶ **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 <https://graphicartistsguild.org/downloadable-disability-access-symbols/>
- ▶ **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.

Speaking with Awareness “People-First” Language

Don't think of the disability, think of the person. Think of the people first, and disability awareness will come quite naturally.

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.

Basic Rules of “People-First” 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 who uses a wheelchair
- ▶ Person with a physical disability; person with a mobility impairment

When writing or speaking about people with disabilities, emphasize abilities rather than limitations, focusing on a person’s accomplishments, creative talents, or skills.

10 Best Practices 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.
3. When meeting a person with a visual impairment, always identify yourself and others who may be with you.
4. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted.
5. Treat adults as adults. Address people who have disabilities by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to all others.

10 Best Practices of Etiquette for Communicating with Persons with Disabilities

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.

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.

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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Information in this handout was reprinted from portions of *VSA arts' Arts Access made easy: Successful Strategies from the Awards of Excellence in Arts Access* paper. The paper is available for download at https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/vsa/resources/arts_access_made_easy.pdf.

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.

Thank you for your time!

Any questions?

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