

## ANNUAL MEETING HANDOUT

# Serving Diverse Needs of Communities

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This session taught attendees how to manage and overcome expenditure barriers in order to create and ensure accessibility at mid- to small-sized museums. This session looked at the cost of different accessible programs, including those for visitors who have vision impairments, dementia and other disabilities.

### Moderator

- » **Jayna Hintz**, Curator of Education, Woodson Art Museum

### Presenters

- » **Marie Clapot**, Program Director, Art Beyond Sight
- » **Leah Fox**, Director of Public Programs, Currier Museum of Art
- » **John Shields**, Docent Manager, The Walters Art Museum

### Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo

As the museum field's premier professional development opportunity, the Alliance's Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo showcases the best thinking from practitioners and visionaries on major issues confronting museums and the communities they serve.

This session handout is from the 2013 Annual Meeting in Baltimore.

# ***Serving Diverse Needs of Communities***

***May 21, 2013***

***AAM 2013 Annual Meeting, Baltimore, MD***

## Tips for Serving Diverse Needs of Communities

Are you looking into implementing a program for people with disabilities at your museum and wondering how to manage and overcome expenditure barriers to create and ensure accessibility at mid-to-small sized museums? What is the cost of launching and maintaining an accessible program? What tools, training, and research are worthwhile institutional investments? How have museums leveraged investments through sharing of resources and partnerships? These are some answers.

According to Disability Status 2010, approximately **56.7 million** people living in the United States had some kind of disability in 2010. This accounted for **18.7 percent** of the 303.9 million people that year (all age groups included). The total number of people with a disability increased by 2.2 million from 54.4 million people in 2005: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/p70-131.pdf>

### How to get some institutional buy-in:

- *Designate a member of your board of trustees as accessibility liaison* with your Access Advisory Committee to help raise the visibility of this important effort.
- *Low-cost programming.* Many modifications can be implemented at minimal cost while others may require specific fundraising. Consider folding accessibility costs into already existing projects such as tour programs, special exhibition interpretation, or capital improvements. By doing this you are spreading the cost, responsibility, and participation of your accessibility program among different budgets instead of having an independent program.
- *Increase awareness.* Staff members may have assumptions about what people can or can't do, leading to discomfort or indifference to the idea of making your institution and programming accessible. Help overcome this obstacle with open and clear communication about your program and its benefits and goals. An e-mail newsletter is an easy way to accomplish this and inviting other museum staff to attend the program.
- *Ask staff members, such as curators and conservators, to get involved.* That is, in ways other than selecting and preparing objects from the collection. They have a wealth of knowledge and most are eager to share. Someone might want to speak, to give verbal descriptions, or teach a workshop.
- *Use your staff newsletter or membership journal to create a higher profile for your program.* Submit an article about your successful projects, and encourage your museum team partners to do the same. When one department submits an article on accessibility, it sets a model for other departments. Also use the newsletter for useful information, such as parking awareness, and other items your staff needs to know. This is another good place for your **Tip of the Month** or **"Did you know...?"**
- *Coordinate Staff training and or informal accessibility meetings.* Give staff an opportunity to learn more about accessibility and disability. Staff members may have personal as well as professional interest in the subject. The attendance at these meetings may be small, perhaps just three to five people. However, this will gradually increase and give you new opportunities for outreach and relationship building.
- *Hire volunteers/interns to help with the work.* Collaborate with your institution's volunteer and intern program or talk to some of your partners (see next section below) to see if their constituents would be interested in volunteering.

### **Looking at ways you can involve your community:**

- *Create an Access Advisory Committee.* Members will bring their personal experience and professional expertise to accessibility discussions and efforts. They will help promote any access-related efforts and programs among their community network and help build connections within the disability community.
- *Seek advice from the experts.* Learning and understanding the needs of your audience is crucial to developing successful programs. Contact experts in universities or hospitals or organizations related to your audience.
- *Reach out to the community.* Successful programs are often based on the partnership with organizations (Alzheimer's Association, National Federation for the Blind, Talking Books Library or any other local agencies/chapters relevant to the targeted audience). They are connected with the population you want to bring to your museum and can help with outreach. Open your museum to their programs, could they hold a board meeting or support group in your facilities?
- *Partner with schools, art teachers and art therapists.* Contact your school districts and ask for the locations with special education classes. Invite schools to come to your program or offer to bring your program to the classroom.
- *Seek advice from peers.* Contact museums that have program in place, attend conferences, get involved with museum collectives.

### **General tips to engage people with disabilities:**

- *Allow time for people to examine the artwork.* Use appropriate teaching and communication tools such as verbal description, tactile diagrams and sign language.
- *Present an appropriate number of pieces.* This varies depending on the group, however always be ready to present more pieces (5 to 7 rather than 2 to 4)
- *Bring handling objects and/or replicas.* Contact museum store and/or local stores for donations. Allow time for people to experience the object and/or ask questions.
- *Give more prompts/ask questions differently.* Pick a person to answer and go on to someone else before providing the information.
- *Offer a two-part program.* Split your time between the gallery and the studio or follow up with a workshop in the school's classroom.

## **Resources for the Session's Interactives**

Between each presenter, the moderator invites the audience to participate in successful low-cost/no-cost tools used by diverse audiences to enhance interactivity in the galleries.

### ***Verbal Description***

#### **Describing Visual Images and Objects Using Non-visual Language**

Creating verbal descriptions of artworks and objects makes them more accessible to people with and without disabilities.

Salzhauer, A. E., Hooper, V., Kardoulias, T., Stephenson Keys, S., & Rosenberg, F. (2003). *Online accessibility training: aeb's guidelines for verbal description*. Retrieved from <http://www.artbeyondsight.org/handbook/acs-guidelines.shtml>

Snyder, J. (2003). Verbal description: The visual made verbal. In E. Salzhauer Axel, & N. S. Levent (Eds.), *Art beyond sight: a resource guide to art, creativity, and visual impairment* (pp. 224-237). New York, NY: Art Education for the blind, Inc, and AFB Press of the American Foundation for the Blind.

### ***Creative Group Storytelling***

#### **Images spark imagination; posing open-ended questions allows people to create their own innovative stories.**

Inspired by Anne Bastings, director of the Center on Age and Community at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Anne Bastings, founder of **TimeSlips**, an improvisational storytelling method that replaces the pressure to remember with the freedom to imagine. Originally designed to support growth and learning with people with dementia and their caregivers, the **TimeSlips** method is fun for anyone.

**TimeSlips** <http://www.timeslips.org/>

**TimeSlips** History <http://www.timeslips.org/about--2/history-page>

#### **Guidelines used to lead creative storytelling session:**

**Observe:** Look at the image; provide a timeframe for this observation.

**Description:** What do you see?

**TimeSlips: Creative Group Storytelling:** We are going to tell a story about this image, you can say anything you want and we will weave it into the story.

#### **Sample Open-Ended Questions:**

Where should we say this takes place? When does this take place? What are we looking at? What should we call it? What sounds do you hear? What season should we say it is? What happens next?

**Remember, there is likely more than one answer; please welcome all answers. There are no right or wrong answers.**

Write down all the responses. Repeat the story using the same emotional tone as the responses. Retell the story periodically as it is being written to help participants refocus their attention. When you sense the group is becoming disengaged, call for a final reading of the story. Clap at the conclusion of the final reading.

## **Online resources**

Art Beyond Sight's handbook for Museums and Educators

<http://www.artbeyondsight.org/handbook/index.shtml>

The Institute for Human Centered Design:

<http://humancenterreddesign.org/>

National Endowment for the Arts' guide to accessibility planning:

<http://www.arts.gov/resources/accessibility/Planning/Intro.pdf>

<http://www.nea.gov/resources/accessibility/Planning/Step6.pdf>

- ✓ *The complete accessibility audit is available through the National Endowment for the Arts: <http://www.nea.gov/resources/accessibility/Planning/Step6.pdf>*  
The *Accessibility Planning and Resource Guide for Cultural Administrators* is an online companion to the printed text *Design for Accessibility: A Cultural Administrator's Handbook* (2003). This guide serves as a "nuts and bolts" how-to for arts accessibility.

National Federation of the Blind: Voice of the Nation's Blind

[www.nfb.org](http://www.nfb.org)

Talaria Enterprises (museum reproductions for touch tours)

[www.talariaenterprises.com](http://www.talariaenterprises.com)

Your state's Department of Rehabilitation Services

Your National Federation for the Blind, American Foundation for the Blind, Autism Speak. Alzheimer chapter; local Talking Books library and more.

## **Publications**

Axel, Elisabeth Salzhauer, and Nina Sobol Levent, eds. *Art Beyond Sight: A Resource Guide to Art, Creativity and Visual Impairment*. (New York, AFB Press, 2003)

<http://www.afb.org/store/Pages/ShoppingCart/ProductDetails.aspx?ProductId=978-0-89128-850-3&mscssid>

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