Understanding Accessible Arts Programming

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NEA Office of Accessibility

About the NEA

Established by Congress in 1965, the National Endowment for the Arts is an independent federal agency that is the largest funder of the arts in communities nationwide and a catalyst of public and private support for the arts.

NEA Office of Accessibility

We provide:

- **Resources** to help make the arts accessible for people with disabilities, veterans, older adults, and those living in institutional settings

- **Technical assistance & training** to:
  - applicants, grantees, artists with disabilities
  - NEA staff
  - State Arts Agency & Regional Arts Org staff

Agenda

- Disability in the U.S. and Tennessee
- Accessibility laws, regulations, and requirements
- Planning for accessibility in the arts
- Assessing physical accessibility
- Assessing program accessibility
- Resources

Examples of Disabilities

- Mobility/physical
- Chronic health conditions, including long COVID
- Hearing
- Vision
- Speech
- Cognitive/Intellectual (e.g. brain injury, Alzheimer's, Down syndrome)
- Neurodiverse/Neurodivergent (ASD, ADHD, Dyslexia)
- Psychiatric (anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress)

Disability in the United States

- Approximately 1 in 4 (27%) of adults in the U.S. are living with disabilities

- 44% of adults ages 65+

- Largest minority group in the U.S.

Sources: Disability Impacts All of Us Infographic | CDC; Disability and Health Data System Explore by Location | NCBDDD | CDC

Tennessee Disability Estimates

Approximately 1 in 3 (32%) adults in Tennessee are living with disabilities

1,747,053 adults in Tennessee have a disability[1]

This is equal to 32% or 1 in 3 adults in Tennessee
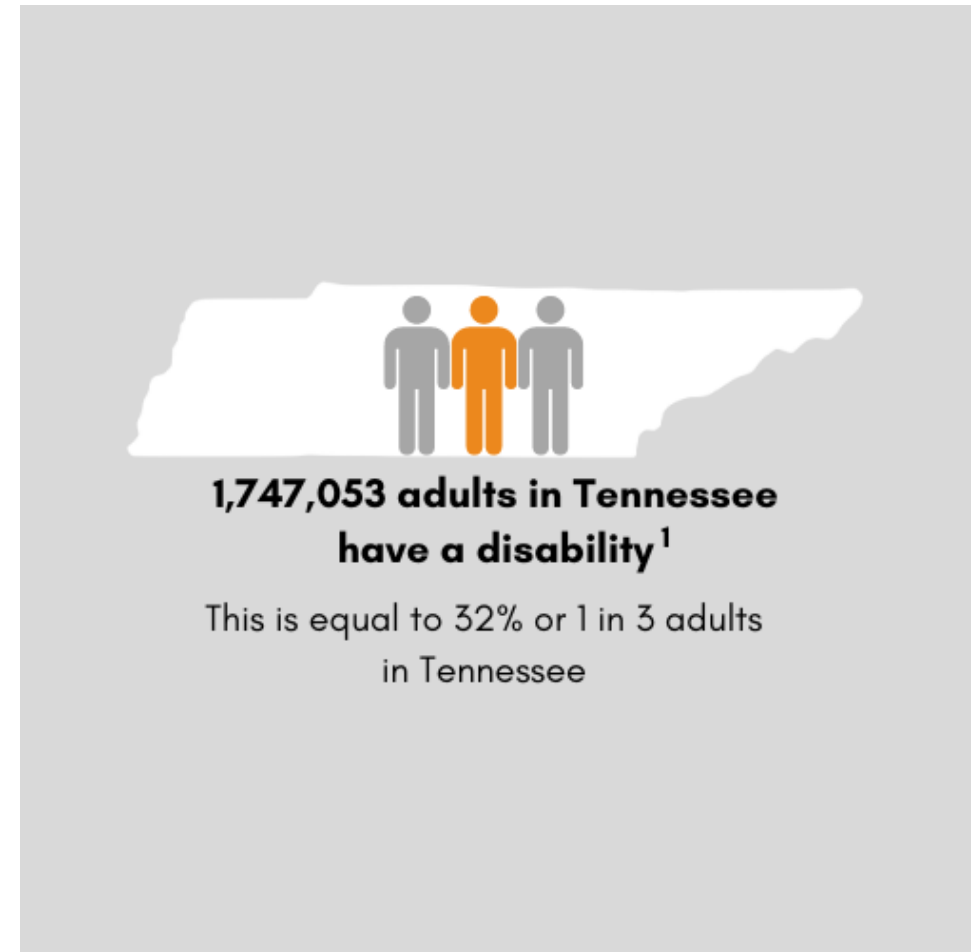
Disability Representation - TN

- 16% of adults have a cognition disability

- 15% of adults have a mobility disability

- 7% of adults have a hearing disability

- 6% have a vision disability

Disability & Health U.S. State Profile Data: Tennessee | CDC

What do all these statistics mean?

- The prevalence of disability across the U.S. and in Tennessee means your program will likely engage people with disabilities in some way.

- As staff, volunteers, board members, artists, students, audiences.

Accessibility is an Organizational Asset

- Maintain and grow audiences

- Bring in new and exciting programs (disability arts, Deaf theater, physically-integrated dance)

- Disability intersects with other ways you may be working to attract audiences

- Disability and accessibility are part of DEIA efforts
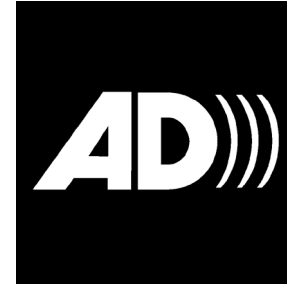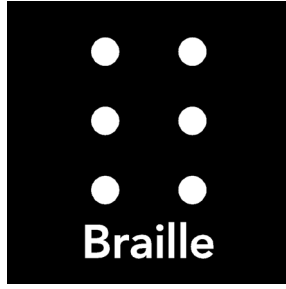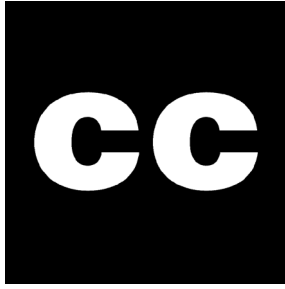
Accessibility Laws, Regulations, and Requirements

Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

Downloadable Access Symbols

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs:

- **Conducted by** federal agencies
  (e.g. NEA events)

- **Receiving** federal financial assistance
  (e.g. NEA grantees, etc.)

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)

Prohibits discrimination and ensures equal opportunity for persons with disabilities (amended in 2008)

- **Title II** – State and local government services (State Arts Agencies, Local Arts Agencies)

- **Title III** – Public accommodations & services, private organizations, commercial facilities, (e.g., museums, performing arts centers, theaters, galleries, classrooms, outdoor spaces, etc.)

This means...

- All organizations are legally required to provide reasonable and necessary accommodations for staff and visitors with disabilities.

Designating an Accessibility Coordinator

- The Accessibility Coordinator serves as point of contact for arranging accommodations.

  - Requirement under section 504 (and those receiving federal funding) and ADA

- Include your accessibility coordinator's name and contact information (e-mail, phone) on your website/promotional materials.

Promoting Access Services

- Include access information in all project publicity (press releases, programs, media, website, e-mail):

    - Can use disability symbols to convey accessibility information/accommodations

    - Provide contact information for requests

    - Additional information about your facility (location of accessible entrances, other services)
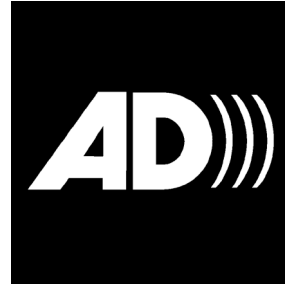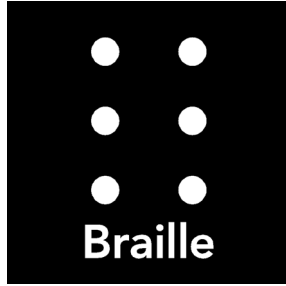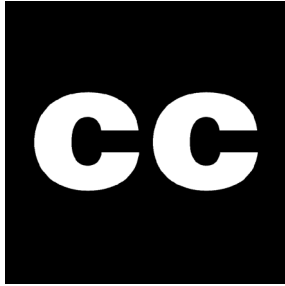
Accommodations Process

- Accommodations can be made:

  - Upon request

  - For specific dates, performances, or activities

  - Included as part of every activity

- Include accommodations request process and contact information on your website/promotional materials

Section 504 Self-Evaluation

- All NEA grantees, including subgrantees, must complete the [NEA's Section 504 Self-Evaluation Workbook](#) or a similar assessment tool.

- The completed workbook must be kept on file and updated every 3 years.

Section 504 Self-Evaluation (cont'd)

- You do not need to submit the workbook, but you must provide it to the NEA or the public **if requested**.

- Failure to have a 504 self-assessment on file is a common audit finding.

Accessibility Planning

Organizational Commitment to Accessibility

- Leadership buy-in for accessibility, top-down

- Create an accessibility policy

- Budget for accessibility

  - Research options, be ready to provide accommodations

  - Include in grant budgets

Organizational Commitment to Accessibility, cont.

- Form an access advisory committee

- Train staff and volunteers

  - On your access services and equipment

  - On how to serve patrons with disabilities

- Partner with arts and disability organizations

  - [Borderless Arts Tennessee | The state organization on arts and disability (borderlessartstn.org)](borderlessartstn.org)

  - [Arts Program and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (vumc.org)](vumc.org)

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Assess Your Accessibility

- Use checklists
  - NEA Brief Accessibility Checklist
  - NEA 504 Self-Evaluation Workbook
- Hire consultants
- Gather feedback from access committee representing different disabilities
- Hire "user testers" for programs and facilities

"Nothing (About Us) Without Us"

- Ensure that people with disabilities are represented throughout your organization:

  - Boards, staff, volunteers, panels, committees, etc.

  - Conduct a community needs assessment

  - Partner with organizations serving people with disabilities

  - Engage artists with disabilities and disability community

Assessing Physical Accessibility

2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design

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Physical Accessibility – Getting in the "door"

- How are all the facilities where arts activities taking place, including historic facilities, accessible to people with physical/mobility disabilities?

  - Individuals with disabilities can include staff, volunteers, artists, participants, audiences and visitors with disabilities.

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Physical Accessibility - Examples

- Ground-level/no-step entry, ramped access, and/or elevators

- Directional signage for accessible entrances, paths, etc.

- Integrated and dispersed wheelchair seating in meeting/assembly areas

- Wheelchair accessible box office

Physical Accessibility – Examples, cont.

- Wheelchair-accessible display cases, exhibit areas, counters

- Wheelchair accessible restrooms and water fountains

- Accessible emergency exits and audio/visual emergency alarms

- Accessible parking

Physical Accessibility for Artists

- Accessible stage/backstage, dressing rooms

- Accessible studios, classrooms, work spaces

- Accessible artist residency studios and living spaces

Physical Accessibility for Staff

- Are your offices and other parts of your facility accessible to staff, including spaces in historic buildings?

- Do you offer remote work or hybrid access for employees?

- Do you have a plan for accommodating employees who acquire disabilities due to injury or illness?
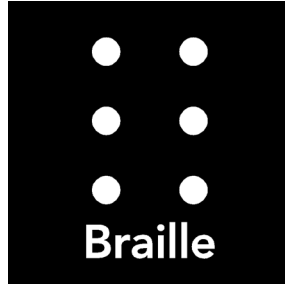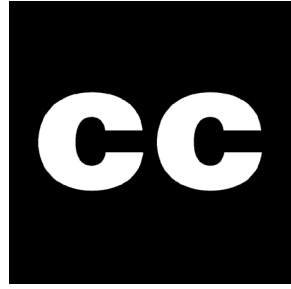
Assessing Program Accessibility

Effective communication and auxiliary aids

Program Accessibility

- How are all aspects of your project activities accessible to participants with disabilities?

- How is the activity and content being shared, communicated, and implemented?

Communication Access

Hearing Disabilities

- Sign language (ASL) interpretation

- Assistive listening devices

- Captioning (open, closed, real time-CART)

- Transcription

Lights, Camera, Caption!

- 80% of viewers are more likely to finish a video with captions

- 80% of 18-25 year-olds use captions all or most of the time

- Increase (7.3%) in YouTube views after adding captions

- Helps with understanding and concentration

Source: Subtitle Stats: How Many People Use Subtitles in 2024? (kapwing.com)

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Communication Access, cont.

Vision Disabilities

- Audio description / visual description

- Alternate formats of print materials (large print, Braille)

- Tactile opportunities

Program Accessibility Examples

- [Plain language](#) (8th grade level)
  - Easy read: 3rd-5th grade level
- Pre-visit materials – what to expect
- Sensory-friendly/relaxed programming (reduced lights and sounds, warnings for strobes, fragrance free, ability to move around)
- Content warnings

More Program Accessibility Examples

- Volunteers/Staff to answer questions and/or provide assistance

- Schedule time for breaks

- Quiet hours/spaces

- Livestream/hybrid options

Electronic Accessibility

Websites, Film, Videos, Podcasts, and Virtual Meetings/Events

- Screen reader navigation, tab controlled websites
- Alternative text for images ("alt tags")
- Accessible fonts, color contrast
- Captioning (open/closed), transcripts
- ASL interpretation
- Audio/Visual description
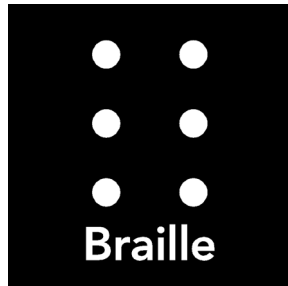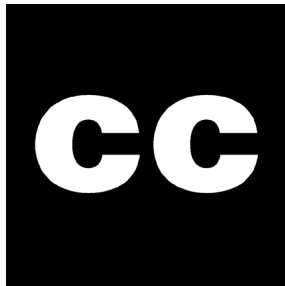
Resources

2024 NEA Funding Deadlines

- [Grants for Arts Projects](#) – July 11

- [Challenge America](#) – April 25

- [Research](#) – March 25

- Subscribe to our newsletter on our website to be notified (see bottom of main page) www.arts.gov

Toolkit on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities

Developed as a partnership between the NEA and Art Beyond Sight

Resources for:

- **Artists** (including cultural workers and youth with disabilities)

- **Arts employers** (presenters, curators, casting directors, etc.)

- **Arts educators** (K-12, higher education, community)

- **Arts funders** (public, private)

arts.gov/ArtsCareersToolkit

Accessibility Resources

- [Brief Accessibility Checklist](#)

- [NEA Office of Accessibility Resources](#)

- [Section 504 Self-Evaluation Workbook](#)

- [Webinar – Accessibility Compliance Requirements for NEA Grantees](#)

- [Downloadable Accessibility Symbols](#)

Tennessee Resources

- ADA/Section 504 Accessibility Resources - Tennessee Arts Commission (tnartscommission.org)

- Borderless Arts Tennessee | The state organization on arts and disability (borderlessartstn.org)

- Arts Program and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (vumc.org)

- Tennessee Council for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing (tn.gov)

- TN Directory of Centers for Independent Living (CILs)

- Working Together. Improving Lives. | Tennessee Disability Coalition (tndisability.org)

- Southeast ADA Center (adasoutheast.org)

Web Accessibility Resources

- [WebAIM](#)

- [WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool](#)

- [Web Accessibility Initiative](#)

- [AccessibilityChecker.org](#)

- [Color contrast checker](#)

- [Resources to Help Ensure Accessibility of Your Virtual Events](#)

Reach out to us!

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