

Towards Accessible Online Presentation Models



Introduction and Resources for the Media Arts Community

Version française

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1. Introduction

About this document and key concepts relating to accessibility.

1.1. About this document

Online presentation models give media arts presenters the opportunity, and responsibility, to make their events accessible to broader publics, including audiences with disabilities and D/deaf audiences. The built-in features of web platforms also help presenters experiment with, and implement, more accessible presentation models for people with disabilities and Deaf people. In this context, media arts presenters are increasingly faced with questions related to access equity for members of D/deaf and disability communities.

Accessibility is a layered process that needs to be considered across an organization's operational and programmatic activities, both online and offline. This said, becoming more accessible is a process that doesn't come with a checklist. This commitment raises questions of equity and asks us to revisit our assumptions and ways of working. Importantly, accessibility should follow the "nothing about us without us" motto and affirm the need for leadership from the D/deaf and disability communities.

For media arts presenters, the process of making presentation activities more accessible should come with a commitment to equity in access. This commitment means rethinking programming and ways of working. It means reaching out to, and collaborating with, D/deaf and disabled artists and audiences. It means being open to new artistic practices, modes of communication, and expectations about outcomes. It means testing things out, learning from failure, and revisiting the meaning of success.

[The Independent Media Arts Alliance](#) (IMAA) has developed this resource to raise awareness of questions related to accessibility and online presentation. The goal is to encourage media arts presenters to think about what "equity through accessibility" might mean in the context of their activities.

This document was written by Mariane Bourcheix-Laporte in collaboration with a Working Group of 9 media artists and cultural workers as part of the [Online Presentation Standards Project](#). Many self-identify as members of the D/eaf and disability arts community.

This document should be used with the [IMAA Fee Schedule](#) and these publications:

- [Intellectual Property and Online Presentation: Guidelines and Resources for the Media Arts Community](#)
- [Online Presentation Workflow: Resources for the Media Arts Community](#)
- [Glossary of Terms: Online Media Arts Presentation Standards](#)
- [External Resources: Online Media Arts Presentation Standards](#)

Note on the language used in this document

The terms “D/eaf and disability” or “D/deaf and disabled” are used throughout this document in reference to individuals and groups who self-identify as D/deaf, hard of hearing and/or as living with a physical, cognitive, intellectual, mental-health, or other disability. IMAA recognizes that the D/eaf and disability community is composed of different groups and informed by a variety of lived experiences of D/deafness and disability. The vocabulary used in this resource is meant to be inclusive of the breadth of identities that may be associated with the D/eaf and disability community.

Context

IMAA has a long history of supporting equity-seeking media arts communities and advocating for creative diversity and self-determination. However, as an organization, IMAA has had limited engagement with D/deaf and disability-led accessibility initiatives. It is important to recognize that the D/deaf and disability arts community has long been advocating for itself and has the knowledge and lived experience required to raise awareness of accessibility needs and practices. By producing this resource, IMAA’s intention is not to speak on behalf of D/deaf and disability activists. Rather, IMAA aims to promote D/deaf and disability activism ideas and values in the media arts sector.

The goal of this resource is to encourage equity in the independent media arts community through accessibility practices. The text draws from the Online Accessibility Working Group's conversations and from other resources related to D/eaf and disability justice and creative access. Quotes have been included throughout the document to illustrate concepts in the words of those with direct experience of D/eaf and disability activism.

The Independent Media Arts Alliance (IMAA)'s Position on Accessibility

IMAA's mandate is to promote and advocate for freedom of artistic expression and creative diversity. Throughout its activities, IMAA aims to build a respectful and supportive independent media arts community. When joining, IMAA members make a commitment to take anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobic positions. The IMAA community also respects and supports the autonomy of Indigenous cultural representation. [Please consult our mandate and principles for more information.](#)

Accessibility is a matter of equity. IMAA recognizes the need for disability justice in the independent media arts community. We must take steps to reduce barriers to meaningful access to media arts culture and support D/eaf and disability media arts practices.

IMAA supports disability justice values and is committed to making accessibility a priority. The production of this resource has been a significant learning opportunity for IMAA. We are aware of the accessibility shortfalls of our existing programs and are engaging D/deaf and disabled artists and cultural workers in the redesign of our activities and offerings. In the long-term, we are committed to collaborating with D/deaf and disability arts organizations on mutually beneficial projects. In this way, we hope to be able to better support the media arts community's accessibility initiatives.

1.2. Key Concepts

Disability justice and critical access

Disability justice is an identity-based framework that affirms the experiences of D/deaf and disabled people. Importantly, disability justice advocates for the self-determination of D/deaf and disability communities. Accessibility centred around the knowledge and politics of D/deaf and disabled people is also called “critical access.”

Disability justice came out of the work of Black, racialized, and queer activists. It fights oppression through an intersectional approach, meaning that it looks at the different layers of identity and how they relate to power. In this view, oppression through ableism must be understood in relation to other experiences of oppression, including sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, etc.

Implications for the media arts community

IMAA recommends that media arts organizations frame their accessibility practices through disability justice principles and values. Critical access can represent a paradigm shift for many media arts organizations. It is important to recognize that adopting a disability justice approach to accessibility is a long-term project that requires a step-by-step approach. For many organizations, this process will require organizational self-reflection and dialogue.

Critical access cannot be achieved by checking off items on a list. It is an iterative process that can take many forms. Members of D/deaf and disability communities should be involved in all these steps, ideally in supported leadership positions.

What is accessibility?

“Accessibility ensures that everyone can participate in cultural life on their own terms. Accessibility entails such considerations as the design of spaces, how publics are received and served, the location of cultural venues, the economic and logistical conditions of participation, and communication strategies.”

— *Charter for an Accessible, Inclusive, and Equitable Culture*, Exéko,
<http://www.chartecultureaie.com/>

What is disability justice?

10 Principles of Disability Justice: “1. Intersectionality, 2. Leadership of Those Most Impacted, 3. Anti-Capitalism, 4. Cross-Movement Solidarity, 5. Wholeness, 6. Sustainability, 7. Cross-Disability Solidarity, 8. Interdependence, 9. Collective Access, 10. Collective Liberation”

— Sins Invalid, *10 Principles of Disability Justice*,
<https://www.sinsinvalid.org/blog/10-principles-of-disability-justice>
[\[You can also consult the French translation IMAA made with the kind collaboration of Sins Invalid here\]](#)

What is D/deaf and disability self-determination?

“Deaf and disabled people do not only want access to culture, they want to assert self-determination: artists shape culture, some claim to be politically committed, some share their imaginations and views of the world. They also want to be involved in all the situations that concern them.”

— *Deaf and Disability Arts Practices in Canada – Summary Report*,
Canada Council for the Arts p. 6

What are crip politics in the arts?

“To crip the arts is to notice, embrace and lead with the difference and disruption that disability creates within artistic production. [...] This means moving away from requesting inclusion within dominant art practices and institutions, and instead thinking about how these aesthetic markers that

often signify and highlight disability and difference can change and unsettle the larger art world.”

— Jenna Reid, “*Crippling the Arts: It’s About Time*,” Canadian Art, <https://canadianart.ca/features/cripping-arts-time/>

What is critical access?

“Traditionally, access practices try to accommodate D/deaf and disabled individuals into the normative world, often using a standardized, check-list approach that does little to challenge the broader culture of ableism. In contrast, what Aimi Hamraie describes as “critical access” is a practice that mobilizes the knowledge carried by D/deaf and disabled people to co-design access practices led by their politics.”

— *Accessing The Arts: Towards Difference-Centered Design*, Creative Users Project, p. 18

How can I learn more? Where can I start?

These resources are good starting points for media arts organizations that want to start engaging with disability justice. To access other materials, see the document [External Ressources: Online Media Arts Presentation Standards](#) or list of resources below:

- *Accessing the Arts: Towards Difference-Centered Design*, Creative Users Project, <https://creativeusers.net/static/d6bb275f255492d4917a74ab93707ddc/2021-Fin al-ATA-Report.pdf>
- *Charter for an Accessible, Inclusive, and Equitable Culture*, Exéko, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HuUER8l68yOE3NjePbXDiEwge9-2yFFS/view>
- *Interrogating Access: Resources for Artists and Organisations*, OBORO <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZAumr6UMSsNcLLK3y53C3w>
- *Crippling the Arts, Art in Translation*, <http://artintranslation.ca/cripping-the-arts/>

Framing Accessibility as an Opportunity

Critical access invites us to reframe accessibility as a creative opportunity, not a logistical challenge. For the media arts community, this means that

accessibility is both an equity-driven practice and an avenue for artistic innovation. The experiences of D/deaf and disabled artists, arts professionals and audiences generate new forms of creative expressions and different ways of engaging with artworks. For media arts presenters, this is an opportunity to experiment with innovative curatorial processes and exhibition designs. For media artists and producers, this is an opportunity to think about how accessibility features can extend their artistic practices.

How is accessibility a creative opportunity?

“Disability arts, as stated above, are political. Disability arts are vital to the disabled people’s movement for how they imagine and perpetuate both new understandings of disability, Deafhood, and madness/Mad-identity and create new worldly arrangements that can hold, centre, and even desire such understandings. Critically led by disabled, mad, and Deaf people, disability art is a burgeoning artistic practice in Canada that takes the experience of disability as a creative entry point.”

— Eliza Chandler, “Introduction: Crippling the Arts in Canada”, *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, p. 3)

What is disability-identified art?

Disability-identified art [...] is not simply created by disability artists, it embraces and promotes disability politics, culture, pride, prioritizing things like resistance and affirmation and vision.

— Alex Kronstein, quoted in *Deaf and Disability Arts Practices in Canada - Research Report*, Canada Council for the Arts, p. 48)

See also the Deaf, Disability & Mad Arts Alliance of Canada’s Practice-Centric Resources (<https://ddmaac.weebly.com/the-art.html>)

What are crip and disability aesthetics?

“The crip aesthetic ventures to embody difference in ways that are not yet understood or defined and reinforces that deficiency is merely a matter of perspective. Disability or crip arts simultaneously question societal and art-world structures, and as with many movements that have been pushed to the fringes of the establishment, it is grounded in social practice and rife with challenging histories.”

— Christina Myers, “On the Complexity of Crippling the Arts,” *Canadian Art*, <https://canadianart.ca/features/on-the-complexity-of-cripping-the-arts/>

2. Canadian Legal Framework

In Canada, several laws establish the rights of D/deaf and disabled individuals. These laws provide a framework that prohibits discrimination based on disability and D/deafness.

2.1 Legislation

Federal Acts

The following federal acts provide a legal framework that asserts the rights of D/deaf and disabled people not to suffer discrimination based on disability. In theory, these laws ensure that D/deaf and disabled people are treated equitably and have access to the same opportunities as others.

Charter of Rights and Freedoms

The [Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#) guarantees that every individual has the right to be treated with respect, dignity, and consideration regardless of “race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.”

Canadian Human Rights Act

The [Canadian Human Rights Act](#) extends the reach of the Canadian Charter of Rights by establishing which discriminatory practices are prohibited. The Act establishes accessibility as a human right. It prohibits discrimination in the

form of denying access to a good, service, facility, or accommodation. This includes denied access based on disability.

Employment Equity Act

The [Employment Equity Act](#) supports the Charter of Rights and Freedoms' and Human Rights Act's objectives. It guarantees individuals the right to employment without discrimination. Under this law, employers must accommodate the needs of D/deaf and disabled employees.

Accessible Canada Act and Standard on Web Accessibility

The [Accessible Canada Act](#) and the Canadian [Standard on Web Accessibility](#) also provide accessibility guidelines for the federal government and its institutions.

Provincial Acts

Some Canadian provinces have also passed accessibility acts:

British Columbia

Accessible British Columbia Act

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/about-the-bc-government/accessibility/legislation>

Manitoba

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act

<http://www.accessibilitymb.ca/>

Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia Accessibility Act

https://nslegislature.ca/legc/bills/62nd_3rd/3rd_read/b059.htm

Ontario

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11>

Québec

Act to Secure Handicapped Persons in the Exercise of their Rights with a View to Achieving Social, School and Workplace Integration

<http://legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/ShowDoc/cs/E-20.1>

2.2. Accessibility and copyright

The [Copyright Act](#) is the law that regulates the ownership and use of copyrighted material, including artworks. The Act provides a legal framework for copyright holders to have a say in how their work is used. It also enables them to collect **royalties** from their work.

For more information on copyright and media arts presentation, please see the [Intellectual Property and Online Presentation](#) resource.

Section 32 of the Copyright Act lists exceptions to copyright infringement tied to accessibility needs. The Act allows “persons with perceptual disabilities” and persons or non-profit organizations acting on their behalf to reproduce a work in an accessible format or to translate and interpret the work in sign language. **This, however, does not apply to “cinematographic works” or to works with commercially available accessible formats.**

The Act defines **perceptual disability** as “a disability that prevents or inhibits a person from reading or hearing a literary, musical, dramatic or artistic work in its original format, and includes such a disability resulting from severe or total impairment of sight or hearing or the inability to focus or move one’s eyes, the inability to hold or manipulate a book, or an impairment relating to comprehension” (*Copyright Act*, section 2).

The Act defines **cinematographic work** as “any work expressed by any process analogous to cinematography, whether or not accompanied by a soundtrack” (*Copyright Act*, section 2).

What this means for presenters

According to section 32 of the Act, presenters may be able to reproduce a work in an accessible format, or to translate and interpret the work in sign language without infringing on copyright (see exceptions above).

This said, IMAA recommends that presenters discuss accessibility issues and accessible formats with copyright holders. Presenters should sign agreements with copyright holders about the production and use of accessible versions of works. IMAA also recommends that presenters collaborate with members of D/deaf and disability communities when producing accessible formats of works.

3. Resources

A toolkit of guiding principles and a list of prompts for presenters as well as the references used in the creation of this publication.

3.1. Toolkit

Guiding principles

These guiding principles promote the development of accessibility practices from a disability justice point of view.

Accessibility should be driven by D/deaf and disability leadership.

Media arts organizations should support the self-determination of D/deaf and disabled artists and communities. This can be done by actively engaging people who self-identify as D/deaf and disabled in all stages of a project.

“Critical of stereotypical representations, artists insist on the importance of considering their perspectives, valuing their voices and their self-determination within cultural institutions and encouraging their involvement in all actions that concern them.”

— *Deaf and Disability Arts Practices in Canada – Research Report*,
Canada Council for the Arts, p. 53.

Accessibility should be a relational practice.

Accessibility is not just about providing services and accommodating needs. It is also about building relationships with the D/deaf and disability communities

and learning from the experiences of D/deaf and disabled artists and audiences. This can help media arts organizations adapt their operational models to make their spaces and events more accessible.

“The ‘mic drop’ moment during our data analysis was when a more urgent problem emerged: the reality that D/deaf and disabled people regularly assume that art is not for them, and therefore they are not seeking out any artistic experiences to begin with.”

— Accessing the Arts: Towards Difference-Centered Design, p. 10

Accessibility should be a creative, iterative, and experimental process.

From the perspective of creative access, accessibility doesn't have strict guidelines. It is a creative process that extends out of artistic creation. It is context-specific and responsive to change. It is an opportunity to experiment and learn along the way. It is an invitation to share and exchange. But this doesn't mean that accessibility can be everything and anything. While being creative, accessible practices should respect existing standards and protocols. Go to the document [External Resources: Online Media Arts Presentation Standards](#) to access existing standards and guidelines.

Carmen Papalia's “[The Five Tenets of Open Access](#)” provides a framework for accessibility as a creative, iterative, and experimental process:

- “Open Access relies on those present, what their needs are and how they can find support with each other and in their communities. It is a perpetual negotiation of trust between those who practice support as a mutual exchange.
- Open Access is radically different than a set of policies that is enforced in order to facilitate a common experience for a group with definitive needs. It acknowledges that everyone carries a body of local knowledge and is an expert in their own right.
- Open Access is the root system of embodied learning. It cultivates trust among those involved and enables each member to self-identify and occupy a point of orientation that is based in complex embodiment.
- Open Access disrupts the disabling conditions that limit one's agency and potential to thrive. It reimagines normalcy as a continuum of embodiments, identities, realities and learning styles, and operates

under the tenet that interdependence is central to a radical restructuring of power.

- Open Access is a temporary, collectively held space where participants can find comfort in disclosing their needs and preferences with one another. It is a responsive support network that adapts as needs and available resources change.”

— Carmen Papalia, “*An Accessibility Manifesto for the Arts, Canadian Art*, <https://canadianart.ca/essays/access-revived/>

Media arts organizations should consider their own capacities and limits.

This is especially important when building relationships with D/deaf and disability communities. The long-term sustainability of these relationships is key, and organizations should allocate human and financial resources to these partnerships on an ongoing basis. With limited resources, accessibility efforts should be focused on the needs of the D/deaf and disability community members with whom relationships have been developed. In particular, D/deaf and disability partners should be equitably compensated for their labour. Organizations are encouraged to integrate accessibility budgets in all of their grant applications to increase their capacities.

It’s important to recognize that there are limits to accessibility.

Some artworks, installations, and experiences cannot be adequately translated into an accessible format. It may be best to leave a work as is if it will be denatured by an accessibility format or if the end user will have a poor experience of it. Collaborating with D/deaf and disabled individuals can help determine if and how works can be made more accessible, or accessible to audiences with certain needs.

Prompts and questions that media arts organizations should ask

How are we engaging with accessibility?

- What are we providing access to? What are we not providing access to?
- To whom are we providing access? To whom are we not providing access?
- Who is our current audience? Who is our desired audience?
- Which community groups do we have a relationship with? Whom should we build a relationship with?
- What outreach, relationship building, and community-building initiatives are we engaged in? What are we missing?
- What is my organization's digital capacity and knowledge of assistive technologies used for digital presentation?

How accessible are we?

- How accessible is our physical location?
- How accessible are our communications?
- How accessible are our opening hours?
- Do we have a contact person(s) or D/deaf and disability consultant(s) who can address these questions?
- Do members of equity-seeking groups feel comfortable engaging with us? How do we know if these individuals feel safe?
- How much do our events and services cost?
- How accessible is the language we use?
- Do we offer accessible services at our events (sign language interpretation, live audio/visual description, closed and live captioning, etc.)?
- When we advertise an event, do we clearly say which accessibility services we will offer and which ones we will not offer?
- Do we provide accessible marketing, such as ASL videos and multiple formats?
- Do we let people know that they can request accessibility services?

How accessible is our website?

- Is it screen-reader friendly?
- Does it use high-contrast colours?
- Does it include alternative media like alt-text captioning, textual descriptions of images and videos, and transcripts?
- Can it be navigated with a keyboard?
- Are the hyperlinks clearly indicated?
- Do we seek feedback from users from different backgrounds and abilities?
- Are our communication materials written in plain language?
- Do we have content in LSQ or ASL? (Knowing that a large part of the deaf population is illiterate in French and English)

How can we support the self-determination of the D/deaf and disability arts community?

- Have we built relationships with D/deaf and disabled artists and audiences? Are these relationships reciprocal, interdependent, and consensual?
- Are members of D/deaf and disability communities active in our organization? How can we make room for D/deaf and disabled artists to participate?
- What does disability leadership look like for us? How can we facilitate D/deaf and disability leadership?
- Do we regularly consult with members of D/deaf and disability communities? Do we pay these consultants a fair wage?
- Do we place D/deaf and disabled artists at the centre of our accessibility initiatives? Do we place D/deaf and disabled artists at the centre of other initiatives?

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