

UNLIMITED...

DEMYSTIFYING ACCESS

**A guide for producers and performance makers:
how to create better access for audiences to the
performing arts**

Foreword

It's great to see a revamped version of this document that has already been downloaded hundreds of times. There is an appetite for change, a will to do more – but often people are stuck at the first hurdle, knowing what might or not be possible. We don't want to write a rule book – far from it – providing access should be about creativity, and (where possible) all access embedded into the artistic nature of the work itself. This is going to mean playing with rules rather than following them. But everyone has to start somewhere - and this is a great place to start!

Jo Verrent, Senior Producer, Unlimited

Written by **Clara Giraud**, Project Manager for Unlimited at Artsadmin and **Nicola Miles-Wildin**, Independent Theatre Maker

Contents

Introduction	4
Where to start - basic tips	6
The Work - how to integrate access	8
Audio description	8
Touch tours	10
Tactile model boxes	12
Captions and palantypists	12
BSL interpreters	14
Relaxed performances	16
Social stories	19
Artistic dialogue – beyond the logistics	20
Navigating costs and funding	23
The context of the work	25
Venue access	25
Marketing	26
Ticket office	28
Access through technology	28

Introduction

If you care about reaching a wide and diverse audience with your work, it is essential to consider questions of access. In the UK there are 13.9 million disabled people – that's about 1 in 6 people. (Source: [Scope](#))

Disabled people face many physical and attitudinal barriers which prevent them from accessing the arts. Access to the arts is a human right and participating in the arts has great benefits linked to well-being. The Equality Act 2010 states that employers and service providers are under a duty by law to make reasonable adjustments to overcome barriers experienced by disabled people.

Therefore, it is our job as producers and performance makers to plan ahead and ensure that everyone is welcome and can access our work!

This guide offers tools and examples to empower artists and producers of performance to remove barriers and make their work more accessible. It also offers some simple solutions for under-resourced small-to-middle scale performing arts producers and makers whose work is not yet fully inclusive and accessible to disabled people.

Some great guides already exist:



[Ensuring your venues and events are open to all: A Brief Access Guide](#)

Created by Shape Arts

With detail on:

- Social model of disability
- Disability confidence
- Accessible marketing and communications



[A Guide to Making Theatre Performances More Accessible](#)

Created by the See a Voice project

With detail on:

- Customer care
- Audience development
- Technical specifications
- Organisational impact



[ISAN Access Toolkit: making outdoor arts accessible for all](#)

Created by International Street Arts Network (ISAN)

With detail on:

- Marketing
- Access for outdoor events
- Evaluation

Where to start – basic tips

What do we mean by access?

Access means finding ways to ensure that fewer people are excluded from our work. We are removing those barriers that make it difficult or impossible for people to attend an event.

Informing your audience

Communicating what access is available is absolutely key to delivering inclusive events.

Let audiences know what you can and cannot provide for them. Be open and straightforward about what you do and any limitations this may have. You may identify that your show is already accessible to a certain group of people. For example, a highly visual show with no spoken dialogue might be suitable for a deaf audience without any changes. Recognise this and actively market the show to these audiences. This will grow and diversify your audience base.

Close communication with the venue will ensure that front of house staff are aware of any access provisions and can work with you on how to best inform audiences. Check with the marketing team about their booking or box office systems. How can audience members note their access requirements or queries?

Consulting disabled people

The best people to help you in making your work accessible are those that experience barriers themselves: consult them! Invite disabled people to a focus group meeting to discuss how the 'access' elements are working or could further be integrated in the piece, or have a discussion with supporting organisations such as [Attitude is Everything](#) or [Shape Arts](#) about whether you have all the details covered.

These exchanges can be key to ensuring you are doing things in the best way possible. A phone call, email or a short meeting might just do it. It doesn't have to be time-consuming but it can bring huge benefits to the work in reaching a more diverse audience – marketing and access research all-in-one.

Remember that many individuals and organisations are overstretched and at capacity, and that many people work in this field as paid access consultants.

When asking disabled people for a favour, consider what you can offer them in return. If you cannot offer them a consultancy fee, could you instead offer free mentoring, free tickets or expenses? Don't always expect something for nothing.

Company members

It is important to inform everyone in the company about the access elements you are putting in place, so that they are aware and prepared. For example, preparing for a 'Relaxed Performance' (see definition on page 16) should mean time to work with the performers to ensure they are confident about how to respond to unexpected sounds and interruptions from the audience. The more at ease they are, the more the ethos will be incorporated within the show to make it a unique experience.

Venue and front of house staff

Agreeing with the programming and the marketing team what access you are providing does not always guarantee that everyone working in the building is aware. Ahead of your show, or when you do the get-in, brief the front of house and venue staff so they know what to expect and are confident about how to act. It is worth asking if front of house staff have already received Disability Equality Training through their employer and will therefore have a good basic understanding of what's required. It is important to make sure that everyone knows which services are available (including dates and times) to ensure the best experience for everyone.

Language

Not knowing which words to use, and which to avoid, when talking about disability and access can discourage some people from tackling the subject. You can find some information about language and disability confidence on pages 9-12 of [A Brief Access Guide](#).

Much can be done at a low cost, or for free, by simply thinking, planning and communicating in advance with everyone involved.

This guide offers some examples and tools for you to make your work accessible. It is by no means exhaustive, so please [contact us](#) or email clara@artsadmin.co.uk with further contributions, so we can keep the guide up-to-date.

The work – how to integrate access

Audio description

[VocalEyes](#) is a London based charity set up in 1998 to provide assistance to theatre venues and producers to meet the needs of blind and visually impaired audiences. They define [audio description](#) as ‘a means of making the arts accessible through words to blind and partially sighted people.’

VocalEyes explains what it offers for the performing arts as a three-part process:

- the description of the visual elements of the performance
- a touch tour
- description of the set and context

The first part is often offered as a description to listen to alongside the performance through a personal set of headphones. Most venues provide the headphones themselves; they allow the user to adjust the volume and hear a live description of the action on stage by an audio describer, who is watching the performance from a sound-proof booth or via a monitor.

Audio describers can be provided by venues or by companies themselves, depending on the situation. They will ask to see a performance or a full video of the show ahead of time if possible. You can also plan to work closely with them to align/incorporate their description to fit the artistic vision of the piece, for example: what tone of voice is the voice-over using? Are they being an objective describer or to they become an additional character?

Another option is to integrate the audio description into the performance, making it accessible to everyone. This means a soundtrack or live speaking during the show that describes the action taking place, giving any visually impaired audiences all the information they need to experience the work. Artists that have done this recently include Gabble Babble in [‘Double Vision’](#) and Claire Cunningham’s [‘The Way You Look \(at me\) Tonight’](#).

There is also experimental work being undertaken by some companies and individuals audio describing dance. [The Rationale Method](#) developed by Nathan Geering, for example, uses sounds and beatboxing to describe dance moves rather than words alone.

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Everyone has different preferences for description, there is no one right way – there’s no such thing as an objective description. You can’t please everyone.

In a live performance context, you have to think a lot about describing the action that’s going on, but also the emotion and atmosphere of what you’re looking at. You’re forced to be creative, and to interpret what you see. I work together with artists sometimes, making a draft description and then going through it with them. Sometimes I come up with ways of vocalising the intentions of what I can see, and I can become another spoken word artist in the room.

I work with [Unscene Suffolk](#), which incorporates audio description as part of the script. It’s embedded in the creative process – really it’s just about doing things in a different order, not any more difficult. You can make something accessible without describing every detail – and this is where the subjectivity comes in. You don’t want to overdo the description, but you want to approach the work by asking yourself: if I couldn’t see what was going on, what would I need to know about the show in order to have a rich experience of it?

Jenni Halton, Performance Maker and Audio Describer

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Another project undertaken by University of York, '[Enhancing audio description](#)', examines the impact of enhancing sound effects to increase understanding and again, minimise the use of additional words. This is mostly for film, television and interactive media but draws on some good examples and ideas.

Unlimited artist Chloe Phillips has been experimenting with new ideas for audio description. [You can read Chloe's blog here.](#)

Finding audio describers:

- Freelancers are often open to negotiate fees depending on the nature of the work, charging day or half-day rates. The [Audio Description Association](#) have a directory, which highlights describers specialised in performance and provides links to various companies and professionals
- VocalEyes provide a range of services and full tariffs on their [website](#)

Touch tours

This is a tour of the set / props or costumes for a performance organised by the performing company. These usually don't cost anything to run, but you do need to know what can and cannot be touched! You don't need to be an expert to organise these (they are very straightforward) but you do need to think through how you might run such a tour. For example, you will need to consider how you will lead people safely around your set on stage and what the key features of your set are, including any set changes that occur within the piece.

Often, touch tours mean audience members can explore the stage to gain a sense of how the staging and set function within a piece, and touch and feel some of the props or costumes if relevant. These usually happen about 45 minutes before a show begins. They can be of interest to anyone who wants to get closer to your set and costumes, so are a great addition that benefits all kinds of audiences.

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We've arranged touch tours to our work for many years. We are

committed to creative access in all of our shows and see this as a vital part of the process, in that it not only enhances the experience of the audience members it is also an enriching experience for the company and the performers, making them look again at the show, their characters, how they present and what worlds and spaces their character inhabits.

The barriers to making touch tours happen are pretty minimal really. You need to work with the venue to ensure the touch tours are clearly promoted, audiences advised that they are available, and booking them made simple and accessible. You then need to work with front of house and other staff to show what you're planning, and involve them in the process. After that, it's a case of finding the best time for front of house, audience and company for these to take place. Our tours usually last between 15-20mins and for a 7:30pm show we would try and start them round about 6:50pm, allowing the audience to get a drink after, the acting company to finish their preparations and front of house to allow general access to the space.

Garry Robson, Artistic Director, Fittings MultiMedia Arts

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Tactile model boxes

A tactile model box is a to-scale model of the set used in the show. It may include fabric swatches of the materials used and tactile diagrams. Having one of these available with front of house staff gives visually impaired audience members an idea of the design and materials used within the set. It can also aid describing scene changes as part of a touch tour.

[Graeae Theatre Company](#) has these available for all of their shows. Tactile model boxes can also be used to help less experienced or neurodivergent audience members understand the theatre and what to expect on their visit. The [MACLIVE in Belfast](#) has integrated them into their work.

Further reading:



[Ways of Seeing Art](#) – a booklet produced by Shape Arts



[An Introduction to Audio Description](#) by Louise Fryer (Routledge)

Captions and palantypists

Using captioning and palantypists makes audio content accessible for hearing impaired visitors and audiences. The dialogue and soundscapes of a performance is transcribed into words for the audience to read. Text can be either incorporated into the design of a set (for example, projected onto a screen, or on a TV monitor on stage), be visible above or to the side of the stage, or offered on individual screens held by audience members themselves.

Captions can be provided in two ways: they can be pre-written and based on the script of the show, or they can be provided live by palantypists who translate the audio content live either from within the venue itself or by remote access.

The great thing about captioning is that it also benefits a wider group of audience members, as many enjoy being able to read the text as well as hearing it, so as not to miss a word. It can be of particular benefit to older and hard-of-hearing audiences and to those with English as a second language.

Stagetext has a number of videos explaining the process of captioning:



[Why captioning?](#)



[Live captioning.](#)

Sophie Woolley – Writer, Actor and Co-founder of Tin Bath Company – explains her creative approach to captions as both a theatre maker and a user of the service:



How did you start thinking about captioning?

I started thinking about captioning my show because I was going deaf and needed captions myself. I disliked the way I had only one chance to see a particular show, because the captions were on one date. Also captions were not an integral part of most shows, they were ‘stuck on’ at the side of the set as an afterthought, so as an audience I would be reading the show and not watching the actors much.

We wanted to see if we could marry the text with the performance and art direction, to give a more immersive experience for deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences. This had an effect on the development of our shows – the writing and direction.

What has it brought to you and your work?

One answer is it might give the audience more chance to absorb the writing in my shows. In terms of advice for venues it brings value to audiences. Hearing people are actually not that hearing – their attention wanders. They often miss lines. Often audiences are older, losing hearing, and need a bit of help. Subtitles also attract people whose first language is not English. In terms of audience retention and new audiences, subtitles are a good thing. In terms of doing the right thing to include marginalised people, it is a great thing, it is of huge, unquantifiable value.

How do you fund the captioning process?

We include the caption budget in each funding application. Budget for tech, caption designer, animator, projector rental, operator costs. Most importantly you should budget for marketing to deaf people. This is not like the hearing marketing. It is extra marketing work. It is not good enough to provide subtitles and expect deaf people to come along. They won't come unless they know about it.



Finding caption professionals/palantypists:



[Stagetext](#)



[Theatre Captioning](#)



[The Association Of Speech To Text Reporters](#)

You can also find professional freelance Palantypists by searching online, but there is no central database for them.

BSL interpreters

[The British Deaf Association](#) suggests that at least 87,000 people in the UK use British Sign Language (BSL) as their preferred language. Having a BSL interpreter at your performance gives BSL users access to the spoken content of the work directly in their own language.

Many theatre companies choose to integrate BSL within the show, either by working with deaf actors to make them part of the action on stage, or by working with a sign language interpreter. The interpreter can also stand separately to the staged action, depending on the aesthetic of the work. Recent projects that have involved interesting incorporation of sign language include [‘Mirror Mirror’](#) by Red Earth Theatre Company and Sue Maclaine’s [‘Can I Start Again Please’](#).

A sign language interpreter can also be pre-recorded and played along with the action. In Birds Of Paradise’s production [‘Wendy Hoose’](#) the interpreter was pre-recorded and shown on a TV screen embedded within the set. The British Paraorchestra also had pre-recorded BSL in their Unlimited Commission [‘The Nature Of Why’](#).

Finding sign language interpreters

Many people find interpreters by asking around their networks or through word of mouth. However, some sites give links to experienced performance interpreters. It is important to work with qualified sign language interpreters. Here are a few links to start you off:



[Theatre Sign](#)



[Assosiation of Sign Language Interpreters](#)



[The National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People](#)

Some venues have interpreters that they regularly work with and who are known to their local BSL using audiences. Not all sign language interpreters are interested or trained in working in a creative way or on stage, so check to see what experience they have and discuss with them how you’d like to work.

[Two Destination Language](#) is Katherina Radeva and Alister Lownie. They make performance work exploring the boundaries of identity and culture. Over the years as independent artists, they have strived to make their work accessible to diverse audiences.



What is your process for working with BSL interpreters?

We’ve both followed the work of companies like [Stopgap](#) and [Graeae](#) for a while, but it was while Kat was working with [Caroline Bowditch](#) that she first saw how dramaturgically integrated BSL can be when making a show. So, with our show ‘Near Gone’ which plays with translation between two spoken languages as a theatrical device, we knew we could play with layering a third language: BSL. We worked with a terrific interpreter who understood performing which was brilliant because it felt like we were making the work richer and more accessible rather than just placing an interpreter at the edge of the stage. Since this experience in 2013, we think of integrating access right from the start of making a new show. It would be silly not to; it’s such a rich form. Our new show, ‘Manpower’, plays with audio description because that makes sense for what we do in that piece; these are tools that we’ve discovered we can use in making better, more provoking, theatre for everyone.

Do you work with the same interpreter each time?

We usually work with the same interpreter because they are not just an interpreter they are a member of the cast. We have worked with two. They are slightly different - they would be, they are different performers. Integrating the interpretation needs time so where a venue wants the BSL version of the show, we bring our own interpreter. We began our process by letting the interpreters see rehearsal videos and having conversations about what we could do, about what would work without compromising the functionality of the interpretation. And then we rehearsed, just as with any other performer. And it was really important that we listened to feedback too – as people who don’t use BSL, we aren’t best placed to judge the interpreters’ choices!

What are the barriers have you experienced with venues?

The main barrier is accepting that the default is not to have BSL. We thought many more places would want it if we made it available. The challenges are usually around money, who pays for what. We tour a lot without Arts Council subsidy which means for us that where a venue wants the show with BSL then they pay for the additional costs. In our experience, selling the show with BSL has been harder due to the cost, not due to a lack of desire to have the show with BSL. Some venues have a really strong commitment to accessibility (and it usually shows in their print material), while for others it is still a new strand that's not yet well resourced.



Toolkit for venues

Welsh theatre maker [Jonny Cotsen](#) has been commissioned by Arts Council Wales to create a [toolkit](#) for venues in Wales. It aims to help companies and venues make their work and premises more accessible for hard of hearing and deaf audiences.

Relaxed performances

This is a performance that has a more relaxed attitude to noise and movement from audiences, widening the possible range of people who might see a show. These performances may also include some changes to the light and sound effects, adapting some of the show content and keeping the house lights on. There are a number of people who may benefit from relaxed performances, including those defining as neurodivergent and also parents with children – and it requires no added costs. Audiences will expect the performance to exclude loud noises or flashing lights.

Make sure you advertise the 'relaxed nature' of the show to your audiences and make an announcement before the event so that everyone knows what is happening and why, as some 'relaxed' audiences may not follow so called 'traditional' theatre etiquette.

At the start of the show it's a good idea for the actors to introduce themselves and say what characters they are playing. This helps people understand that the performance is make believe; it's a story and not real life.

The concept of 'relaxed performance' is becoming widely understood by audiences, venues and programmers as a result of much research, campaigning and promotion. The term can cover a variety of adaptations rather than these being universally agreed.

Organising a relaxed performance is fairly straightforward. It also means ensuring the venue is equipped to welcome everyone who might wish to attend.

There are some theatre companies that specialise in creating high quality experiences specifically tailored to people with a specific range of access requirements and have innovative approaches:



[Oily Cart](#)



[Bamboozle](#)



[Replay Theatre](#)



[Frozen Light](#)

Jess Thom, of Touretteshero, explains what a relaxed performance is and what you should consider:

In my view, relaxed performances send an important message to people who might otherwise feel excluded from the theatre by showing that they're welcome and have been thought about. More generally, I think relaxed performances create a different atmosphere for the whole audience, giving everyone permission to relax and respond naturally.

Relaxed performances don't need to be complicated either. From my perspective the important, but quite simple elements they should include are:

- Pre-show information giving a guide as to what to expect from the show;
- An easy read synopsis
- A clear explanation for all audience members about what a relaxed performance is when they book
- Staff who take an inclusive approach from start to finish
- An introduction at the start to remind the audience that it's a relaxed performance and to give permission to anyone who needs to move or be noisy the freedom to do so
- A clear plan of how any complaints from other audience members will be managed

Also there should ideally be:

- A quiet space outside the auditorium where people can go to if they need it
- Some consideration given to sound and lighting levels

More of Jess Thom's thoughts about relaxed performances can be found on [her blog](#).

Social stories

A social story, also known as Visual Story, is a short description of a particular situation, event or activity which includes specific information about what to expect and why. Many venues have them on their websites to highlight access. It also enables people to understand what will happen during their visit and for staff working with groups to undertake pre-visit activities. It helps to familiarise audiences with the venue before they arrive.

Examples of social stories can be found on the websites of [Children's Theatre Company](#) and [Nottingham Theatre Royal](#).

Artistic dialogue – beyond the logistics

Adapting the work

Considering the accessibility of your work may open up new artistic enquiries and enhance the aesthetics of the piece as a whole. Many artists have highlighted the benefits that thinking about inclusion has had on their work – not only can they reach new audiences, but they also have the opportunity to look at the artistic material from a different perspective.

Jack Dean, Unlimited commissioned artist, reflects on the process of making his show, Grandad and the Machine accessible to visually impaired people:

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I was challenged by Unlimited to incorporate access elements into my show for the first time, which kind of makes sense, since being supported as a disabled artist while ignoring the needs of other disabled people would be pretty hypocritical. Being new to the whole concept, I was guided by them towards letting the artistic content of the show guide the approach to access, rather than rigidly imposing one method. As a storytelling piece, the show comes with a sort of built in audio description, so the mission became to “blind-test” the text and smooth over any gaps in the description of important activities for the characters. All in all, I think this will make the show better for fully sighted people rather than compromising it, which is great for everyone.

You can read more about Jack Dean’s experiences on his [blog](#).

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Nadia Nadarajah, a deaf theatre maker, explains the importance of creative integration of sign language from an audience point of view:

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I am passionate about seeing sign language on the stage performed as part of the art form and not as part of the access. That is the key thing for me. I want the sign language used on stage (whether it’s by a deaf actor or an interpreter) to be clear, fluent and in keeping with the style of the production so that it becomes a part of the artistic vision of the production and not just an afterthought for access, or thrown in because it looks pretty.

The use of sign language in theatre has to be a part of the art, not just for access and please use deaf interpreters or deaf actors to deliver this element for your audience members to truly experience equivalence in both languages.

You can read Nadia’s full article in this [Ramps On The Moon blog](#)

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Who is it for?

Sometimes, a work of art cannot be accessible to everyone. Unlimited encourages artists to make their work ‘as accessible as it can be to the widest audience possible within the aesthetic of the work itself’. Be open and honest about access provision, and how it aligns with the artistic nature of the work. If you have little means and capacity to address the accessibility of your show, don’t let yourself be overwhelmed by all the different elements “access” could require. Instead, focus on the few things that feel really aligned with the nature of the work, and deliver those well.



Jo Bannon, Unlimited commissioned artist, tells us her experiences of making her piece Exposure accessible:

Exposure is a one-to-one performance, most of the experience takes place in pitch darkness, and is experienced through sound. I investigated the ways of making the piece accessible to a wide range of disabled people. The nature of the work, though, meant that BSL interpretation of the soundscape was not possible – it would require light, which contradicts the core artistic concept. I now tour the work with a hearing loop, for those with a hearing impairment that can use one. I always request wheelchair accessible spaces, and provide an audio described version of the performance and instructions for ushers to know how to help visually impaired audiences. However, I make it explicit to the box office teams that the piece is not accessible to profoundly deaf people, so as not to cause disappointment.



Navigating costs and funding

Venues

Making work accessible to all should be part of the initial development of a work. It should always form part of the discussion with programmers. Is it the venue or the company that will provide the equipment/staff/funding to deliver any access elements?

Never assume that a venue will not ‘be the type’ to be interested in the access you can provide. Having a conversation about what can or cannot be done is a small step towards access for all not being an exception.



Two Destination Language share their experience of finding the financial means to make their work accessible:

Where possible we include the costs of making work more accessible in an Arts Council England Project Grant application for making the show, because integrating BSL means that we need to weave it into the show, rehearse that and learn it. That’s sometimes difficult when we devise work and aren’t sure what’s going to work. In different works, there are different stages of development at which it becomes clear how we can integrate wider access.

But in terms of the touring costs, the venue pays for the BSL version which is generally around £250 more than the normal fee: it’s a day rate for the performer plus travel and accomodation. There are venues who try to operate a 50/50 policy where the company and the venue split the BSL costs half way - that only works if you’re touring with a grant to cover that or are able to negotiate very profitable deals! There are venues who are very hot on making the work they present accessible like [Eden Court](#), [Dundee Rep](#), [The New Wolsey](#) and [Colchester Arts Centre](#) and there are other venues who simply can not afford the cost, or access is not a priority. Some university venues know they have students with access requirements, which pushes it up their agenda. For us as a company, it is absolutely a priority, so during negotiations we push for the BSL version.



If you don't have the budget/funding for access there are creative ways to include it.



Stephen Lloyd from [Amplified Theatre](#) tells us how they integrated captioning for their theatre show Six.

We invested in a projector which we link up to a laptop in order to provide captions for our deaf and hard of hearing audience members. Associate artist Stephen Collins and myself create these by copying and pasting our scripts into (many) PowerPoint slides which we then operate on the night in full view of the audience, projected onto the back wall or a screen. Some of our short plays have been in BSL, meaning that many of our hearing audience have had to rely on the captions or a voice over actor to access the performance. Even with no budget, it is possible to make your work accessible - you just do it.



Funding

There is no magic pot of funds to make events or buildings accessible, but this shouldn't put people off from making the effort to think about access in the first place. The most obvious way of covering access costs is to include them in your project budget from the start, so that they are an integral part of making and presenting the work. You can include access elements on your [Arts Council England and National Lottery Project Grants](#) and [Arts Council of Wales funding](#) application forms.

Some venues, such as the [Attenborough Arts Centre](#) in Leicester, have schemes in place which offer the opportunities to support emerging talent and disabled-led work with access at the core.

The Paul Hamlyn Foundation has an [Access and Participation Fund](#) which accepts applications on a rolling basis for large scale projects delivering this objective.

The context of the work

Venue access

Because of legal requirements as detailed in [The Equality Act 2010](#), new buildings in the UK must now consider inclusive design, and should be built to include aspects such as wheelchair access and accessible toilets. As such, it's easy to forget that many venues and outdoor events do not have suitable facilities. Make sure you discuss the accessibility of premises before you decide on a space, so that you and the collaborators are all aware of what is and isn't possible. Have someone do an access audit of the venue or see if the venue has reviews online:



[DisabledGo](#)



[Euan's Guide](#)

Negotiate what can be achieved by the venue and yourself. Work with one another to make your event happen in the best and more accessible way possible.

Some things to check:

- Is nearby parking available?
- Are there accessible toilets?
- Are there any areas of the venue that are not wheelchair accessible (e.g. the bar, and back stage)

If physical access is limited, look to see what you can enhance. You can rent ramps and accessible portaloos, bring in additional lighting and portable trackways. These can be affordable and easy to organise (i.e. [Roll-a-ramp](#) or [The Ramp People](#), [Portakabin](#) or [Hire-a-Loo](#)).

As well as step-free access, access considerations should include making adjustments for people that might be uncomfortable in crowded or loud environments. Having a dedicated "quiet space" available during events and festivals will make them more accessible.

The space does not have to be very big, but it should be gently lit, ideally with soft furnishings and a space to lie down. Low noise and music in cafés and surrounding areas can also make people feel more comfortable and make it easier to communicate. For visually impaired audiences, clear signage and ensuring areas such as the Ticket Office and café are well lit also helps.

Marketing

All the efforts you might put into making your work accessible are meaningless without a strategy to advertise to potential audiences and making your marketing materials accessible. By thinking carefully about your marketing material you can reach a wider and more diverse audience. Making the writing easier to read, having a more creative and playful format will certainly help older people and those experiencing dyslexia access your event. Below are some basic marketing guidelines:

Print guidelines, some basics

- Use text at 14 point (12 point is the absolute minimum)
- Many blind and visually impaired people will require a point size of 18+. If in doubt, ask
- Avoid italics, serif or 'handwritten' fonts or capitals for long, continuous text
- Use high contrast between colours and text (at least 25%)
- Avoid putting text over images, unless you use a gradient or a semi-transparent layer between the text and the image to 'smooth' the image. This is an often overlooked issue with arts brochures and flyers
- Avoid glossy papers (they reflect too much light), low weight paper (because text can show through), and paper folds that hide text;
- PDFs are often incompatible with screenreader software and therefore may be inaccessible to Blind and partially sighted people. It is best to have a plain Word version of any documents and offer a choice of formats

Unlimited developed an [online guide for making marketing accessible](#), made in partnership with the Arts Marketing Association.

Video captioning

As with stage captioning, captions on videos benefit all audiences, not just people with hearing impairments. Many people will view videos without sound, especially if viewing on mobile devices in a public space. Anyone with English as a second language will also appreciate the captions – so it's a worthwhile investment of time and effort.



Sophie Woolley, writer, actor, and co-founder of Tin Bath Company explains why captions in marketing are important:

Deaf people do not read hearing marketing, because they are excluded from the hearing arts. Deaf people follow word of mouth deaf community news and deaf news outlets. You need a well connected (paid) deaf person in your ranks to put the word out. It is easier than it was because there are more online deaf news sources, and Facebook.

I mainly take notice of email mail outs to me as a deaf person, with SUBTITLED SHOW in the header. I no longer need subtitles at most shows these days due to my cochlear implant. But when I was still totally deaf, I had to wade through a lot of marketing that was not relevant to me as it was not accessible.

Make sure there is an access page on your venue website for easy access to information about captioned shows. Deaf unemployment and a more complex general economic disadvantage is higher than in the hearing community, so you should budget for discounted tickets.



There are a lot of programmes that can help you add subtitles and audio captions to video at little or no cost:



[Apple clips app](#) allows captions to be added as you record your video and can be edited once you have finished



[Ai media](#) provide captions service and support Facebook Live to now include captions



[Aegisub](#) – a cross platform, open source tool for creating and modifying subtitles



[YouTube](#) offers a guide on how to add subtitles and closed captions to your content

BSL flyer

For some deaf audiences access to a BSL flyer is a great marketing tool. It provides information on the show, the venue and box office. If you have BSL in your show then it's a great way to market this to a deaf audience. Remember there are 87,000 deaf people who use BSL – communicating in their language will help them identify that the show is accessible to them.

Here are a few examples of BSL flyers:



[Royal Exchange Theatre Manchester](#)



[Fingersmiths - Up N Under](#)

[Signly](#) can also be of use as it enables better access to written content for deaf sign language users.

Audio flyer

If you are providing audio-description, you should create an audio flyer to promote your show to the target audience. This is free and easy to do by recording on a simple device and using a platform such as Soundcloud to host the file.

Have a listen to some audio flyers:



Graeae: [This Is Not For You](#)



Taking Flight: [You've Got Dragons](#)

Ticket Office

Making a booking to see a show is a crucial part of the process for all audiences and can really influence their experience. No matter what access provision you are making, the booking system should allow for anyone to see what you are providing and let you know of their access needs.

Many venues use online booking systems, but also have phone lines available. Whatever the tools, it is important to agree with the venue as to how an audience member is informed about the access provided at the event and how they can communicate their requirements. Remember to include ticket office email and text numbers as an option here, not only for deaf customers but for other people who find using a telephone difficult. Provide as many options for communication as possible.

Access through technology

A range of new technology is providing solutions for access at low cost. Some of these are tools that you can use yourself, others are examples of great initiatives tailored for a specific context, which might inspire you. Some are still at prototype phase, but worth exploring.

Please [contact us](#) with any additional tools we can add.

The Difference Engine

Talking Birds created this [discrete new tool](#) for making events and performances accessible to visually impaired, deaf and hard of hearing audience members by delivering captions or audio description to their mobile devices.

Show and Tell

An [interactive visual story](#) that helps children with autism familiarise themselves with the circus experience before they go, helping alleviate some of the anxieties associated with unknown experiences. The app can be used as a springboard to exploring other live performances, arts and cultural opportunities with family and friends.

Developed by Circus Starr, funded by Nesta, Arts Council England.

If These Spasms Could Speak

Performance maker Robert Softley Gale created an iPad app which includes a full script of his show If These Spasms Could Speak along with the visuals and music, for anyone that wanted access to that content before or after the performance. He also provided small Android tablets to audiences that needed them, which allowed them to hear a [pre-show audio description](#).

Open-access coding for live captions

If you are using live-streaming at your event, you might be doing live captions at the same time. In order to embed the captions within the live stream you can use a [code created for the No Boundaries conference](#) offered in creative commons.

UCAN-GO

[This app](#) helps visually impaired people and other audiences navigate around a venue or location. The team of creators is available to adapt the content, which could be particularly useful for immersive or installation-based performances.

Nothing in this document should be taken as legal advice or opinion. It remains the duty of individual organisations to ensure that their work and practice are within the law.

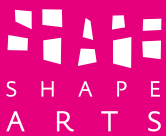
This guide is regularly updated so please get in touch with any thoughts, stories, suggestions and ideas:

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