Expanding Opportunities in Theaters and the Performing Arts
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Toolkit Goal:

1) Help theaters, performing arts organizations, and other entertainment professionals become more inclusive of people with disabilities, and

2) Provide resources to people with disabilities interested in acting and other theatrical and live entertainment professions.

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About Us:

**Arts4All Florida** provides, supports and champions arts education and cultural experiences for and by people with disabilities. A private not-for-profit organization, Arts4All Florida conducts art education programs in schools, Department of Juvenile Justice facilities, and community centers; promotes the accomplishments of artists with disabilities through our artist registry, exhibitions, and performances; and increases access to the arts through professional development workshops. Arts4All Florida is headquartered in the College of Education at the University of South Florida. [www.arts4allflorida.org](http://www.arts4allflorida.org)

**Theatre eXceptional**, a Blue Butterfly Production, is a company dedicated to producing work for, about, and including artists with disabilities. Theatre eXceptional actively recruits artists with disabilities for its performing arts training programs, community productions, and professional productions in order to ensure that artists with disabilities are visible and represented in the theatre community as a whole. [www.bluebutterflyproductions.org](http://www.bluebutterflyproductions.org)
PART 1: Guest Services and Preparing for Guests With Disabilities

This section focuses on how to provide an accessible and inclusive experience for patrons attending your performances and events.

“We just had this big discussion about inclusion versus accessibility. For me being inclusive doesn’t necessarily always mean being accessible. To be inclusive just means you have a good heart, people are welcome and invited to the table. Being accessible means you’re actually helping people get to the table safely if necessary and feeling welcome there. You’re out there doing something to make that inclusive attitude work. We are committed to being both inclusive and accessible.”

- Detour Company Theatre

Make your commitment to access apparent, not an afterthought! Show that your organization WANTS people with disabilities to attend programs.

A Beginner’s Guide to Accessibility

The theatre community must shift its mindset on accessibility from something that we are legally required to provide for audience members to something we look forward to providing in order to grow our audiences and allow our work to reach as many people as possible.

Getting the Word Out

- Make your accessibility information easy to find on your accessible website. Click here for more information about making your website accessible.
- Show people of all abilities enjoying your facility in your marketing materials.
- Use access symbols on your marketing materials and provide information for the contact person for patrons to request accommodations. Provide multiple ways for patrons to contact this person.
- Provide a list of accommodations available at your facility.
Tickets and Seating

- Ensure you have sufficient accessible seating located throughout your facility THAT DOES NOT REQUIRE STAIRS TO GET TO. Ensure that patrons with disabilities have a choice in their seating like everyone else. Ensure that your facility has patron companion seating adjacent to the accessible seating, when possible.
- Provide multiple ways for people to purchase tickets- online, onsite, and by phone.
- Ensure the will-call area is wheelchair accessible.
- Ensure that sightlines to American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters are clear and that reserved seating close to interpreters is available for deaf or hard of hearing audience members and their accompanying guests.
- Allow patrons using accessible seating or those needing additional time to enter early.
- Offer an accessible ticket in a reduced price range or free tickets for support staff or aides for patrons who require assistance for safety or accommodations. Ensure your organization has a policy defining who is eligible for this reduced/free price ticket.
- Click on the links for more information on accessible ticketing and seating.

Getting Patrons into the Building

- Take a good look at HOW the house is accessible:
  Can patrons with disabilities enter through the front door like everybody else or do they have to enter some other way? If they have to enter another way, what can you do to make that entrance as welcoming as the main entrance (having an usher stationed there with playbills, having that entrance open to any patron, etc.).
- Make sure there are accessible parking spaces and drop-off/pick-up points. Remember that many patrons will not need a van-accessible parking spot but might need a close parking spot as walking far distances might be difficult.
- Ensure that all doors have enough space for mobility devices (such as wheelchairs, walkers, scooters, and canes) to pass through.
- If doors do not have automatic openers, prop them open or station volunteers to assist.

“As a patron, I really appreciate it when they assign someone from front of house to the accessible entrance, especially in these older buildings that are really rough to get into. They can be a maze and it’s nice to have someone accompany you to the elevator and over to the wheelchair seating. It’s helpful when there is someone from front of house waiting so you don’t have to go on a wild goose chase looking for someone to help you, because they know whether they’ve sold accessible seats or not.”

– Katie Calahan
Basic Facility Accessibility

- Ensure your paths are clear and a MINIMUM 36" wide. Remove moveable items that can block passages.
- Have sufficient lighting throughout your building to help people with visual impairments see better.
- Install signs written in Braille throughout your building.
- Ensure that restrooms are accessible and inviting and that the floor area beyond the swing of the door has sufficient space for a walker or wheelchair. Ensure that a person using a wheelchair can reach the sink, soap, and paper towels.
- Ensure that water fountains are accessible.
- Be aware of door handle heights.

Provide Accommodations

- Provide accommodations as requested by patrons or consider automatically scheduling performances with interpreters or sensory friendly performances and then advertise those performances so that people with disabilities feel welcome and invited.

  - **Audio Description**: Provides concise, objective descriptions of what is taking place on the stage for audience members who are blind or have low vision. Audio description can be provided live or pre-recorded. Whenever possible, hire an appropriate performing arts professional trained in audio description (for example- a dancer for a dance performance). For more information on audio description, download the Kennedy Center’s guide.

  - **Captioning**: Closed captioning can be turned on or off, while open captioning is always visible. Utilize Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), a simultaneous transcription of what is being said at a live talk or performance. If providing captioning, ensure that the captions are in good proximity to the stage so that readers can still enjoy the performance and read the captions easily. For more information on captioning and CART, download the Kennedy Center’s tip sheet.

  - **American Sign Language (ASL) Interpretation**: Provide ASL interpretation for patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing. Some deaf patrons prefer ASL interpretation as opposed to captioning. If you are using an ASL interpreter, ensure that you are placing the interpreter in a location where the patron can still fully see what is happening on stage. One option for directors is to have interpreters shadowing the actors so patrons can see the actor and the interpreter at the same time. Remember to market these programs as shadow-interpreted programs.

  - **Scripts**: Have scripts available in advance for deaf or hard of hearing patrons. Discuss this when leasing your script and what their terms are for how patrons can get the script (can it be downloaded from your website or do you need to email it based on requests?).
• Sensory-Friendly Performances: A sensory-friendly performance may involve adapting the house rules, having a relaxed attitude to noise and movement, keeping the house lights on at a dim level, reducing the sound levels, providing a cool-down space, and providing pre-theater preparatory activities so the person with a disability begins to understand and anticipate what might happen at a performing arts experience. For more information on sensory-friendly programs, download the Kennedy Center’s guide.

The above tips are very basic suggestions for making your facility and programs accessible. For more information, download the National Endowment for the Arts’ “Design for Accessibility” guide.

“When the theater chooses to have people with disabilities on their board or in upper management positions; when they are in the room, invited to the table, and not just given a voice, but actually have their voice heard and make an impact; that’s when, I think, a theater really starts to take off.”

- Vanessa Severo

General Tips and Principles for Communicating with Persons with Disabilities

The key to providing quality services to guests with disabilities is to remember that all guests are individuals. In most cases the best way to learn how to assist guests with disabilities is to ask them directly.

RELAX: Treat people with respect and consideration. See the person who has a disability as a person, not as a disability.

• Adults with disabilities are adults and deserve to be treated and spoken to as adults. Do not make decisions for them. Avoid that ‘sing-songy’ tone of voice often used with children and don’t talk down to people with disabilities.

• Speak directly to the person with a disability rather than through a companion or ASL interpreter who may be present. Be patient. A lack of immediate response does not indicate that the person can’t or won’t respond.
● Listen attentively when you are talking with a person who has difficulty speaking. Some disabilities may drastically vary a person’s ability to speak clearly. If necessary, ask questions that require short answers, a nod or shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond. If you are struggling to understand someone’s speech, consider apologizing for not understanding; sometimes our attitude and body language can imply that the person whom you are struggling to understand is somehow doing something wrong or making a mistake because they cannot be understood. THEY are doing what they can to communicate, YOU are failing to understand them - a short “I’m so sorry I didn’t catch that, could you say it one more time?” or “My apologies for misunderstanding you” can really make a person who is struggling to be heard or understood feel more at ease.

● Provide people with disabilities every option you provide those without disabilities. If the option they choose presents a difficulty concerning their disability, discuss ways you could modify or adapt the choice.

● Just because someone has a disability, do not assume they need help. If you offer assistance, wait for the offer to be accepted. When asking if someone needs assistance, ask open-ended questions so that patrons can tell you exactly what they need, rather than providing options or asking yes or no questions which can be limiting (i.e. “How can I help you?” vs “Do you need me to push your wheelchair?”). Do not insist on providing assistance.

● Keep your guests informed. Let them know what is going on if there is a delay or other unexpected situation. When there are unexpected situations, have staff check-in personally with guests with disabilities, as there may be an impact to their needs and accommodations or adjustments may be necessary.

● There are visible disabilities as well as invisible disabilities, meaning not all disabilities are apparent. A person may make a request or act in a way that seems strange to you. That request or behavior may be disability-related. Even though these disabilities are hidden, they are real. Some accommodation requests by people with invisible disabilities may seem superfluous to people without disabilities, however, all people with disabilities are the experts on their own needs.

● Post a sign if you will be using strobe lights as these lights may induce seizures.
People First vs Identity-First Language

In general, Arts4All Florida promotes the use of People First Language - language that puts the focus on individuals rather than on a disability. People First Language helps us remember that people are unique individuals and when we label them by a medical diagnosis, we devalue and disrespect them as individuals.

Consider the following when speaking to or about people with disabilities:
- Emphasize abilities, not limitations.
- Do not use emotional descriptors such as unfortunate, pitiful, and so forth.
- Do not use condescending euphemisms. They reinforce the idea that disabilities cannot be dealt with up front.
- Do not sensationalize a disability by saying afflicted with, crippled with, suffers from, victim of, and so on.
- Do not portray successful people with disabilities as superhuman or heroes.

Examples of People First Language:

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<th>Negative Phrase</th>
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<tr>
<td>People with disabilities</td>
<td>The handicapped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A man who uses a wheelchair</td>
<td>The wheelchair-bound man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A girl with a traumatic brain injury</td>
<td>The brain-damaged girl</td>
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While it is generally a safe bet to use People-First Language, there are members of some disability groups who prefer Identity-First Language, in particular some people in the Deaf and Autistic communities prefer Identity-First. Their reasoning is that they consider their disabilities to be inseparable parts of who they are. If you are working with individuals with disabilities, ask them their preference.
Service Animals

Service animals serve a great variety of functions beyond seeing-eye guide dogs. They can fetch dropped items, alert owners of potential seizures or blood sugar issues, and even pull wheelchairs. The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that service animals be able to accompany individuals with disabilities in all areas where members of the public are allowed to go. Under Florida law you can only deny entry if the animal’s behavior poses a direct threat to the health and safety of others and a patron with a service animal cannot be segregated from other patrons.

Defining a Service Animal:

- A service animal is not a pet.
- It is a dog or miniature horse trained to provide assistance to an individual with a disability.
- The work done or tasks performed must be directly related to the individual’s disability.
- The provision of emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship do not constitute work or tasks for purposes of this definition.
- In Florida, service dogs in training are also covered.

Identifying a Service Animal:

- There are currently no license or certificate requirements by the state of Florida.
- They are not required to wear identifying “clothes”.
- Per the ADA, you can ask:
  - Is the animal required because of a disability?
  - What work or task has the animal been trained to perform?
  - Are you training this animal as a service animal? (Florida law)

For more information on service animals, click here.
Guest Service Tips

Assisting People with Mobility Disabilities

Mobility disabilities cover a wide range, from the person who has difficulty walking great distances to the person who uses a wheelchair all the time. A wheelchair may be the most visible sign of a disability, but it is important to remember that the wheelchair is a tool. The guest using the chair may or may not be able to walk without crutches, canes, braces, other aids, and may be using the wheelchair because it is faster, to conserve energy, or for increased mobility and greater access.

Assisting People Who Use Wheelchairs

There are several forms of mobility aids that have wheels: manual wheelchairs, motorized power or battery-operated wheelchairs, and three-wheeled scooters.

- A person using a power wheelchair or scooter will generally not need to be pushed.
- Individuals in manual chairs may or may not want assistance having their wheelchair pushed. Always ask first. You may see a type of wheelchair, commonly known as a sports chair, that doesn’t have handles on the back of the chair. These chairs are intended to be maneuvered by the person sitting in them and not by someone pushing.

Remember these basic tips

- Don’t lean, hang on, or touch a person’s wheelchair. It is an extension of the person’s body. If you bump into it, remember that a jolt may cause pain or discomfort.
- Get on an eye to eye level if the conversation continues for more than a few minutes. Don’t force someone to physically look up at you.
- Consider distance, weather, and surfaces such as stair, curbs or inclines when giving directions.
- If a person requests that you push their wheelchair, be gentle and don’t start, stop, or turn corners abruptly. When going up or down a slope, warn the person in the chair.
- Don’t try to maneuver a chair with a person in it if you feel that you will lose control. Get assistance and use two people if necessary.
- If you have to “bump” a chair up or down a curb or step, ask the individual what direction they prefer. Some may wish for you to lead so that you take the person and the chair backwards.
- Never lift, transfer, or carry a person in a wheelchair up or down a flight of stairs, or in and out of their seats. This could present a safety hazard for you and the guest.
If you are pushing someone in a wheelchair through a noisy area, be aware that they may not hear you speak if you’re directly behind them.

Allow a person who uses a wheelchair or other mobility device to keep them within reach if they transfer to a seat, unless there are fire and safety considerations. If the wheelchair or mobility device must be placed away from the patron, and the patron agrees to this, let them know where it will be, the process for retrieving it during the performance, and when and who will bring it back to them at any intermissions or the end of the performance.

Ensure that patrons in accessible seating are able to get to the accessible restrooms once they are seated or during the performance.

“Sometimes it’s really hard to leave your accessible seating to go to the bathroom and then get back to your seat. Sometimes there’s no way out once you are seated, you’re there for the duration, so just hold it.”

- Katie Calahan

Assisting People Who Use a Walker, Cane, or Crutches

Remember these basic tips

- Never grab a cane or walker to assist someone. If they have a mobility aid such as a cane, crutch, or walker, the guest may be safer using those than holding on to you.
- Offer your arm, never grab or take their free hand or arm. This could cause the guest to stumble or fall.
- Offer your arm when going up or down stairs or a ramp without handrails.
- Always ask the individual if they would prefer for you to stand to their right or left.
- Warn guests about changes in level or texture of the floor. Be aware of modifying your pace. Walk slower, so that you aren’t rushing the guest.
- Warn the guest about changes in light. If you are moving from an area that is brightly lit to a dark space, or vice-a-versa, give the guest’s eyes time to adjust.
Storing Mobility Aids

● When the motor of a power wheelchair or scooter is turned off, it can be difficult to move. If a guest is transferring from their wheelchair/scooter to a theater seat and there isn’t room for the wheelchair/scooter by their seat, they may wish to leave the scooter nearby.

● Many theaters have a designated area to store mobility aids and have ushers who can bring them to the guest at intermission and the end of the show. Make sure the guest is aware of where this location is and how to get in touch with someone to bring their mobility device to them if they require it prior to the intermission or end of the show.

● It is not recommended to ride or try to “drive” a guest’s scooter. This can be dangerous to you and other guests. If a guest requests assistance for you to move a power wheelchair or scooter, ask the guest for instructions.

Assisting People Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision

Guests with vision loss will range from those who are completely blind to those who can’t adjust quickly to changes in lighting conditions. Typical vision is 20/20. That means a person can clearly see an object 20 feet away. If someone is legally blind, their vision is 20/200 or less in their better eye. That means if an object is 200 feet away, this person would need to stand 20 feet from it in order to see it clearly, but a person with typical vision could stand 200 feet away and see that object perfectly. Total blindness is the complete absence of vision and light perception. Many people with vision loss have light perception or may see various images or fields of images.

Remember these basic tips

● Introduce yourself. State your name and position.

● Use a normal tone of voice and speed, there is no need to yell or exaggerate your speech.

● Use the person’s name, if you know it, when starting a conversation so they know you are talking to them and they can determine your location in the room.

● Tell the person if you leave or move away from the conversation.

● Don’t hesitate to use the words “look” and “see”.

● When giving directions, be as clear and specific as possible. For example: instruct the individual to “move forward or continue in your path of travel” rather than “go straight” or “straight ahead”. Identify landmarks that their cane may encounter like a potted plant, water fountain, or noises like a humming soda machine. Estimate the distance in steps. Point out obvious obstacles in the direct path of travel as well as changes in surface level such as stairs or ramps (provide the number of stairs) and floor textures such as carpet and wood floors.
**Assisting as a Sighted Guide**

Being a sighted guide is a way of walking with and guiding a person who is blind or has low vision safely and efficiently.

- When offering to serve as a guide, you should identify yourself and ask if the person would like assistance. If they request assistance, touch the back of their hand with the back of your hand, telling the person to take your arm just above your elbow.
- The person who has low vision should walk a half-step behind you and follow the movements of your body as you walk. While you walk, you should explain where you are going, what you are passing, and obstacles that you are avoiding.
- When you are entering a narrow passage, tell the person you are guiding that you are entering a narrow area. You should move so that your arm is behind your back. This directs the person to walk behind you.
- Inform the person you are guiding when approaching steps or an escalator. Explain which way the steps are going (up or down) and how many there are. Encourage the person to place their hand on the handrail, if there is one. Walk up or down the steps in front of the person. Let the person know when you come to the landing or to the last step.
- When approaching a curb, pause briefly at the very edge of the curb and say whether the curb goes up or down.
- When coming to a door, stop first, then say whether the door opens toward or away from you, and whether it opens to the right or the left. The person being guided can then move to the appropriate side. Open the door and proceed.
- When sitting down, guide the person’s hand to the back of the chair and tell him or her whether the chair has arms.

**Assisting People Who Use Guide Dogs or Canes**

There are three main ways people who are blind or have low vision travel: with a guide dog, with a cane, and without adaptive assistance.

- **Guide Dogs**: While the dog is in harness, that dog is working and you should never pet, talk to, feed, or otherwise distract it. Sometimes a person with a guide dog may request you walk behind their left or right shoulder and give verbal direction. The guest may opt to have the dog follow you or else ask you to be a sighted guide. If the dog follows you, be aware that it is easy to get separated in a crowd and that it is useful for you to give verbal directions and warnings.
- **Canes**: People who use canes will either follow you or ask you to be a sighted guide. Walk on the side opposite the cane. Guests detect objects and potential obstacles by swinging the cane in a wide arc but cannot detect overhangs (i.e. exhibit cases, wall mounted signs, etc.). You need to verbally warn them of these potential obstacles.
- **Without adaptive assistance**: People who don’t use guide dogs or canes frequently do not appear blind. It is important not to make assumptions concerning how much a person can see simply by the way they look. They may have limited vision or difficulty with light and shadow perception.
Assisting People Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Hearing loss ranges from mild to profound: one person may be able to hear everything but very high-pitched sounds while another may hear only the roar of a jet engine and another hears nothing. The range of hearing loss includes the person who has age-related mild hearing loss to the person who is congenitally (born) deaf. Many individuals with hearing loss benefit from the use of assistive listening systems.

Remember these basic tips

- Get the person’s attention tactfully. Wave your hand, gently tap their hand/shoulder, or flash the lights.
- Ask the person how he or she prefers to communicate (lip reading, sign language, writing, etc.) and accommodate as best you can.
- Speak clearly and slowly, but don’t exaggerate or shout. This does not help the person to hear.
- Don’t be embarrassed about communicating via pencil and paper. Getting the message across is more important than the medium used.
- If an ASL interpreter is involved, speak directly to the person who is deaf, not the interpreter.
- Ensure presenters/performers use microphones.
- Keep your sentences short.
- Try to rephrase a thought rather than repeating the same words.
- Be a lively speaker. Use facial expressions that match your tone of voice, and use gestures, body language and pantomime to communicate.

Lip Reading

Some people who are deaf or hard of hearing will read lips, but it is generally believed that only approximately 50% of what is spoken can easily read and understood through lip reading. To facilitate lip reading:

- Make sure you are facing the light.
- Look directly at the person while speaking. Even a slight turn of the head can obscure the person’s vision.
- Keep your hands and hair away from your mouth. Be aware if you are a full-mustached or bearded man that you may be difficult or impossible to lip read.
- Speak naturally: don’t over enunciate or exaggerate words and do not raise your voice.
Assisting People Who Have Speech Disorders

Speech and language disorders can interfere with a person’s ability to express his or her thoughts or to be understood. Regardless of the severity of the speech disorder, a person’s ability to interact and communicate with others will be affected. The causes are varied. They may be present from birth, or they can occur in childhood or later in life due to accident or illness. While a speech disorder affects one’s ability to speak words so they are understandable, many people with speech disorders have no problem understanding or reasoning.

Remember these basic tips

- Address the person with the speech disorder directly. Do not assume someone with a speech disorder lacks the capacity to understand.
- Give your complete attention to the person who has difficulty speaking.
- Be patient. Do not correct and do not speak for the person. Do not supply words or finish thoughts for the person. Allow extra time for the person to articulate what they are trying to convey.
- If you do not understand something, do not pretend that you do. Ask the guest to repeat what he or she said and then repeat back the parts that you understand.
- Do not urge a person who stutters to slow down or start over. This tends to make the stuttering worse.
- Speak clearly and distinctly but naturally. Be aware that people might feel like you are talking down to them if you speak too slowly.
- Keep your manner encouraging. The longer you talk, the easier it will become to understand. People with speech disorders want to be understood as much as you want to understand. Often the guest is used to having to repeat things in order to be better understood.
- Ask questions that require short answers.
- Consider writing as an alternative means of communicating, but first ask the person if that is acceptable. Have pens and paper available.
- Ask for assistance only after making every effort to understand the guest. People tend to give up too quickly when encountering people who have speech disorders. Seek assistance from another volunteer or staff person as a last resort. Always be respectful of the guest when asking for assistance.
- If you are struggling to understand someone’s speech, consider apologizing for not understanding; sometimes our attitude and body language can imply that the person whom you are struggling to understand is somehow doing something wrong or making a mistake because they cannot be understood. A short “I’m so sorry I didn’t catch that, could you say it one more time?” or “My apologies for misunderstanding you” can really make a person who is struggling to be heard or understood feel more at ease.
Augmentative/Alternative Communication

Achieving effective communication is more important than the method used and there are many ways to facilitate conversation. Using a communication device can take longer, so be patient and allow the individual to finish before you try to respond.

- **Communication board**: A communication board can be as simple as someone pointing to various pictograms (pictures that represent concepts) or commonly used words or phrases, cut out and pasted on a piece of cardboard or on a computer or iPad screen.
- **Speech-generating device**: A speech-generating device allows users to type out words, phrases, or sentences that are converted into computerized speech or text.

Assisting People Who Have Cognitive Disabilities

As with all other disabilities, cognitive disabilities have a wide range of manifestations, from the individual with dyslexia whose reading speed may be slower, to the individual who requires a personal assistant to accomplish daily tasks. Clinical diagnosis of a cognitive disability can include Down syndrome, traumatic brain injury (TBI), autism, dementia, Attention Deficient Disorder (ADD), and more.

Remember, people with cognitive disabilities often have good hearing and vision, but the message may not be processed properly once it is received.

**Remember these basic tips**

- Speak slowly and distinctly. Support what you are saying with body language and other visual cues.
- Break information into smaller concepts.
- Give specific instructions and set simple guidelines. Don’t underestimate the individual’s potential to understand you.
- Give extra time for the person to process the question and process a response to your question.
- Phrase instructions in the positive. For example, “Walk carefully and slowly inside, it is dark” is more easily understood than “Don’t fall”.
- Help the person feel comfortable. Maintain a pleasant voice and facial expression.
- Treat the adult who has a cognitive disability as an adult, not a child. Don’t talk down to the individual.
• Consider moving to an area with fewer distractions, allowing for more direct focused contact.
• Some information processing problems may affect social skills such as an unconventional or a complete lack of response. Do not confuse this with rudeness.
• Remember that some guests may make spontaneous utterances or need to get up and move. Do not assume someone is behaving inappropriately. It may simply be a natural behavior.

Part 1: Resources

Arts4All Florida
https://arts4allflorida.org

Cultural Organization Resources
https://arts4allflorida.org/Resources-for-cultural-organizations.html

Webinars
https://arts4allflorida.org/webinars.html

Florida Division of Cultural Affairs
http://dos.myflorida.com/cultural/info-and-opportunities/resources-by-topic/accessibility/

Kennedy Center- Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability Resources: includes tip sheets on captioning and CART, large print programs, service animals, ticketing, and more
https://www.kennedy-center.org/globalassets/education/networks-conferences--research/research--resources/lead-resources/tipsheet_captioning_and_cart.pdf

TipSheet: Online Accessible Ticketing
https://www.kennedy-center.org/globalassets/education/networksconferences--research/research--resources/lead-resources/tipsheet_accessibleonlineticketingprinciples.pdf

TipSheet: Hold and Release Policies for Wheelchair-Accessible Seating
https://www.kennedy-center.org/globalassets/education/networksconferences--research/research--resources/lead-resources/tipsheet_regulationsandwheelchairholdandreleasepolicies.pdf

Audio Description for People with Vision Loss
https://www.kennedy-center.org/globalassets/education/networks-conferences--research/research--resources/lead-resources/2013kc_audiodescripguide.pdf
Assistive Listening Devices for People with Hearing Loss
https://www.kennedy-center.org/globalassets/education/networks-conferences--
research/research--resources/lead-resources/2012_kc_ald_booklet.pdf

Sensory friendly Programming for People with Social and Cognitive
Disabilities
https://www.kennedy-center.org/globalassets/education/networks-conferences--
research/research--resources/lead-resources/sensoryguidebook.pdf

National Endowment for the Arts
https://www.arts.gov/accessibility/accessibility-resources/nea-office-accessibility

Design for Accessibility: A Cultural Administrator’s Handbook

Resources to Help Ensure Accessibility of Your Virtual Events for People with
Disabilities
https://www.arts.gov/impact/accessibility/resources-to-help-ensure-
accessibility-of-your-virtual-events

Department of Justice- Disability Rights Tip Sheets
Ticket Sales
https://www.ada.gov/ticketing_2010.htm

Mobility Devices
https://www.ada.gov/opdmd.htm

Service Animals
https://www.ada.gov/service_animals_2010.htm

Service Animals- FAQ

ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities

ADA Requirements
http://www.ada.gov

Website Accessibility
http://www.ada.gov/pcatoolkit/chap5toolkit.htm
**Going to the Show:** Social stories for bringing a child to a theater space for the first time  
[https://miamidadearts.org/education/going-show](https://miamidadearts.org/education/going-show)

**Audio Description:** National List  
[http://www.acb.org/adp/services.html](http://www.acb.org/adp/services.html)

**Braille Transcription**  
National List: [https://nfb.org/braille-transcription-resource-list](https://nfb.org/braille-transcription-resource-list)  
Florida-based: [http://www.brailleworks.com](http://www.brailleworks.com)

**Deaf Artists and Theatres Toolkit, Cahoots Theatre and Toronto International Deaf Film and Arts Festival Resource and guide**  
[http://deafartistsandtheatrestoolkit.com](http://deafartistsandtheatrestoolkit.com)

**The Gene and Dave Show**  
[https://www.thegeneanddaveshow.com/](https://www.thegeneanddaveshow.com/)
PART 2: Beyond Patrons—Committing to Inclusion in Hiring, Casting, and Selecting Work

This section focuses on how to provide an accessible and inclusive environment for your staff, crew, and talent.

“I don’t want to act at a place that I can’t invite people to come see me” because it is not accessible.

– Diana Elizabeth Jordan

Ensuring the Accessibility of Your Physical Space for Cast and Crew

Actors with disabilities are often excluded because theaters, directors, and entertainment venues think accommodations will be too challenging and/or hiring actors with disabilities might cost more. Accessibility can be built into your production from the get-go. Having a physically accessible set and facility will actually save time and money because it makes it easier for doing set changes and moving equipment. Plan with the seven principles of Universal Design in mind.

1) **Equitable Use**- The design is useful to people with diverse abilities.
2) **Flexibility in Use**- The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
3) **Simple and Intuitive Use**- Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user’s experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.
4) **Perceptible Information**- The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user’s sensory abilities.
5) **Tolerance for Error**- The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
6) **Low Physical Effort**- The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.
7) **Size and Space for Approach and Use**- Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user’s body size, posture, or mobility.

For more information on Universal Design, download the comprehensive [Universal Design New York guide](#).
“While a little over a third of the performers with disabilities stated that a reasonable accommodation would help them in their work, 60% never asked for an accommodation because they believed employers would be reluctant to hire them. Many of the performers were unwilling to be candid about their disability in fear of being viewed as an object of pity and incapable of doing the job.”

- “The Employment of Performers with Disabilities in the Entertainment Industry” report

**Things to Keep in Mind:**

- Ask (in a respectful way) if there is anything your employee needs and communicate this to the staff that will need to know to provide it. Use an access audit form to ask all employees:
  - How they prefer written information: standard, large-print, Braille, recorded audio?
  - Do they require communication support like an ASL interpreter?
  - Do they require wheelchair access?
  - Do they have mobility impairments that restrict their use of steps?
  - Do they have any specific equipment/software they need to carry out their responsibilities?
- Be proactive! Invite artists with disabilities to work in your space to see how the space works for people with different needs.
- Ask yourself- how does an actor with mobility issues get on the stage? Where’s the ramp/lift? Is the ramp/lift in front of the stage through the audience, or is it a piece of plywood in the back alley up to the garage door used to load and unload all the set materials? What kind of message does that send to the performer about how welcome they are in your theater?
● Be aware of what you are physically asking people to do (walk, climb a ladder or stairs, etc.) and think through adaptations if someone might not have the strength or mobility to do them.
● Orient actors and crew to the site and layout of the spaces. Provide raised-line maps of spaces, if needed.
● Think through your schedules and establish break times that work for your staff’s needs as well as any support staff (ASL interpreters, captioners, assistants, etc.)
● If you have staff who use service dogs, ensure there is a safe place for the dog to have toilet breaks and make sure to notify other staff there will be a dog present.
● If you are an organization that rents space from performing arts centers, make sure to visit the space in advance to review accessibility. Schools, colleges, and universities are great facilities to rent because they are required to have accessible performance spaces for students.

Pathways

● Make sure all pathways as well as the backstage are wheelchair accessible.
● Avoid obstructions and hazards that intrude into the path of travel.
● Have stable, firm, and slip-resistant walking surfaces. Avoid irregular textures, ridges, and rough or uneven traveling surfaces. Slippery floors are VERY dangerous for a person with a mobility disability.
● Have flush transitions between rooms and floor surfaces.
● Mark potentially hazardous stairs, ramps, and transitions with contrasting colors, textures, or materials to alert users.
● Make sure any steps (especially those that are of atypical height) have a handrail.
● If you have a wheelchair lift, make sure to maintain it properly so it’s always in good working order.
Sets and Stages

- If using ramps for people to get on/off stage, make sure they are not too steep.
- When painting sets, paint the top with non-skid paint that is a different color.
- Round the corners of all set pieces.
- Build sets as light as possible and add hand grips so actors can lift and carry it easily.

Doors

- Remember that fire doors can be extremely difficult for someone with a disability to open. Whenever possible, use lightweight doors that can be opened and closed with very little force.
- Be aware of door handle heights.
- Install handles, locks, and latches operable with one hand and without requiring tight pinching, tight grasping, or twisting of the wrist.

Lighting

- Ensure good lighting backstage to enable employees to more easily navigate spaces safely.
- Ensure sufficient lighting so that deaf and hard of hearing artists can see the ASL interpreters and/or read lips.
- Illuminate surfaces backstage evenly without strong shadows.
- Ensure there is sufficient lighting on stairs and along pathways in places that require a darkened environment.
- Avoid highly reflective surfaces.

Amenities

- Ensure there are accessible dressing rooms that are easy to get to, especially if an actor will need to have quick costume changes.
- Ensure there are accessible bathrooms backstage, preferably with a shower and water fountain. Don’t require actors with disabilities to use the front of house accessible restroom.
- Ensure break spaces are accessible and appliances are usable by people with disabilities.
- Take note of where light switches and monitor boxes are located and whether or not they are accessible. Consider keeping a sturdy step stool and/or grabber stick/reaching tool in each dressing room or green room.
Seating

- Provide multiple types of seating (higher stool-like chairs, hard surfaces, softer seats, etc.) that allows cast and crew to decide what works best for them to easily get on and off.
- Provide seating near sets/stages for people who cannot stand for long periods of time.

Selecting Inclusive Works

“[People with disabilities] have a unique vision. They view the world completely differently than anyone else and art is all about having a unique vision. So they think outside the box in a totally different way. And that’s what’s so exciting about the creative arts, is that everyone comes from a different place in life.”

- Brent Johnson

Honor the spirit behind the slogan, “Nothing About Us Without Us.” Include people with disabilities on your Board and creative leadership team. Create new, devised, or original work with artists with disabilities at the core of the production team (as actors, directors, writers, etc.) to bring their voice and vision to the forefront. Solicit scripts and program work by playwrights with disabilities as well as work that prominently features disabled characters. Check out the Mixed Blood Theatre Script Club for more resources.
Casting and Hiring People with Disabilities

Make sure you are casting actors with disabilities to play characters with disabilities, but don’t only cast actors with disabilities to play characters with disabilities, cast them to play characters not written to be disabled. Casting a performer with a disability in a role that is not traditionally played by someone with a disability can bring a new, fresh perspective or depth to the role not seen or explored before. Include people with disabilities in crowd scenes and as background characters. Remember that your cast should reflect people in society and that a piece of theatre can still represent disability without being about disability.

“Theater organizations and directors [should keep] an open mind for trying new things and unique castings. A director might see somebody and automatically think, ‘Oh my gosh, there’s no way they can do this role’ but if given a chance and support, they could turn out to be fabulous, the best thing you’ve ever seen. Because you took the time to look at it from a different angle or a different direction. Taking the right chance on unique or nontraditional casting can add so much to the story and the character.”

– David Dauber

How to Find Talent with Disabilities

- Budget for extra time and resources. When working towards inclusive casting, you might have to allot more time and resources than you normally do to be able to find the right actors.
- Have open calls/auditions marketed on social media. Partner with organizations that work with people with disabilities (like Arts4All Florida) to promote open calls on social media.
- Make sure that all classes or training courses your company offers state explicitly that they are accessible to people of all abilities, and that your teaching staff is trained and comfortable working with students with disabilities. This is a great way to get to know and work with actors, writers, or designers with disabilities that you can then hire down the road.
● Consider non-traditional routes of casting if your show calls for actors with specific disabilities. Reach out to schools, people in the community, and disability-specific Facebook groups.

● Be specific as to your production’s casting needs and list all requirements in breakdowns (a “breakdown” is a brief description of a forthcoming production, along with the characters and roles featured in that production. It is created and released to begin the process of casting the actors who will perform those various characters and roles.)

**Holding Accessible Auditions**

“Conducting a really good audition, the rule should always be and I just wish it was the law, all auditions must happen in fully accessible spaces even if you’re not planning on auditioning anybody with a physical mobility impairment. I just think that they should all automatically be wheelchair accessible. And actually interpreted. I just think all auditions and job interviews should ultimately assume that a disabled person is going to apply and provide access and it not even need to be discussed. That for me would be the gold standard.”

– Kiruna Stamell

● Include the audition sides you will be using in your audition notice so that all actors have access to them and can prepare as needed (“sides” are the selections from a script that an actor is provided as material for an audition). PDFs can easily be linked to in emails and on webpages, as well as on message board and social media postings. This is helpful for actors who struggle with reading and/or comprehension, and may want to just memorize the sides in order to give their best and most uninhibited audition. Also consider including a large print version of the audition sides and/or an audio recording of the audition sides.

● Ensure that ALL actors are able to get to the audition room AND stage. It’s uncomfortable for the actor and the hosts of the audition to have to move locations (like an accessible lobby or hallway) in order to see an actor’s audition. It’s also discouraging for a performer to have to audition in a different space than all the other actors at the audition (i.e. an actor with mobility issue having to audition in front of the stage when everyone else is auditioning on the stage).

● If conducting auditions by video conference, have an ASL interpreter and/or captioning available.
• Provide certified ASL interpreters if requested. During the audition, make eye contact with the actor not the interpreter. Do not say, “Tell him/her/them….” Have the interpreter stand behind the casting table so the creative team can focus on the actor.

• If you will be working with a deaf actor, consider hiring a Director of Artistic Sign Language (DASL). The Director of Artistic Sign Language is a person with extensive knowledge of Deaf history and culture, with years of experience working with the differences between everyday conversation and artistic storytelling. The DASL works collaboratively with the director and other creatives to honor the project’s artistic vision. For stage plays and musicals, the DASL also provides useful tips on how to maintain physical health while signing entire shows eight times a week, without exacerbating pre-existing issues, or causing new injuries in the wrists, arms, and/or shoulders.

• Be patient when working with actors who have speech delays.

Cold Readings vs Memorized Material vs Improvised Material

• If hosting an audition that involves cold readings, make sure this is clearly stated in the audition notice.

• If hosting an audition that involves memorized material, make sure this is clearly stated in your audition notice along with what kind of material you are looking for (i.e. time limit and style of material). If you want specific material to be memorized (i.e. a scene or monologue from the show), make sure this is clearly stated in the audition notice. Include that specific material in your audition notice so that ALL actors have access to it and can prepare as needed. Note that the memorized material format requires more preparation for performers, but can be helpful to performers who may struggle with reading and/or comprehension so they can give their best and most uninhibited audition.

• If hosting an audition with improvised material, make sure this is clearly stated in the audition notice. This format is a great way to see an actor’s skills and imagination without the hurdles that cold reading or memorization can cause for actors that struggle with reading and/or comprehension.

“It’s a matter of taking this pressure to perform in a typical way off of the actors and giving them an opportunity to choose what’s most successful and best for them. By removing those hurdles for them, you [the director] can really see where are their strengths, where are their weaknesses. You’re taking the pressure off them, and you can actually see where they’re at skills wise and comfort level.”

- Detour Company Theatre
Rehearsals and Performances

BEFORE rehearsals begin, provide time and space for artists with disabilities to have a discussion with you about what specific accommodations they may need throughout the rehearsal process. Initiating the conversation shows the artist that you are open and enthusiastic about providing them whatever they need to be successful. Be open to their requests and creative when coming up with solutions. Here are some things to think about.

Additional Rehearsal Time, Prep Time, and One-on-One Coaching

- Allow additional prep and memorization time.
- Explain the meaning of lines (if needed).
- Be precise with directions and explanations; if a direction is not sinking in for the actor, try to explain it a different way. Keep trying things until it clicks! Direction is all about clear communication.
- Project the script on the wall behind the director so actors can look out and read the script instead of holding scripts or having someone provide lines.
- Repetition is critical. Rehearse material consistently and often. Avoid staging a scene, then not returning to it in rehearsal for several days or weeks.
- Provide plenty of opportunity for breaks and downtime; be aware that the mental and physical strain of rehearsals can be more taxing for artists with disabilities.
- Encourage actors to record rehearsals if needed.

Consider Transportation

- How are the cast and crew with disabilities, who might need to use public transportation, going to get to your rehearsals? When are rehearsals? Do buses run that late, on weekends, holidays, etc.?

American Sign Language

- If you will be working with a deaf artist or crew who speaks ASL, consider teaching all staff and crew some very basic signs, especially things like “lights on/off”, “hold”, “go ahead”, “danger”, “help me”, “show me”, etc. Ask the deaf artist what words they think would be most important for the staff/crew to know.
Costuming

- Discuss costuming with the person with a disability and any issues the person may have with costume limitations. For example, costumes may need Velcro in the front instead of buttons or fasteners in the back. Many of the experts we talked to also mentioned the importance of being able to bring their own shoes or pick shoes based on a selection given by the costume staff because of their particular mobility needs.

Performances and Additional Events

- Be cognizant of when you schedule additional events during the run of a show (i.e. photo call, pick up rehearsals, promotional events, etc.).
- Provide plenty of opportunity for breaks and downtime; be aware that the mental and physical strain of performances can be more taxing for artists with disabilities. Example: rather than scheduling a pick up rehearsal the afternoon before an evening performance, schedule it the day before, so that artists are fully rested on performance days.

Post Show Talkbacks

- Give artists with disabilities the option to participate in talkbacks if they wish, but also allow them to sit out if they do not want to participate. They may be too tired from the performance or simply not comfortable participating in an open discussion.
- If they do choose to participate, moderators should make sure their voice and insight is shared equally to that of the other artists. Allow them extra time and space to speak and share their thoughts if needed, without interrupting or rushing them and NEVER speak for them or finish a thought for them.
- If asking for questions or comments from the audience, moderators should be prepared to field possible uncomfortable questions or comments. Feel comfortable gently quieting audience members and/or rephrasing their questions or comments to be more polite. As the moderator of a post-show discussion, it is your job to steer the conversation so this is not impolite or rude. Also, modeling correct language and behavior is a great way for people to learn without making them feel uncomfortable or defensive.
Casting Non-Disabled Actors as Characters with Disabilities

Theaters should ensure that all characters written with disabilities are played by actors with disabilities. Hiring a non-disabled actor to play a character with a disability is problematic because it implies that disability is something that can be put on and taken off like a costume (i.e. just change your voice or speech pattern OR just sit in a wheelchair) instead of a life experience that can only be fully understood by those that live it. When casting, it is vitally important that the production team make an objective casting choice that best serves the story and message of the play, and that they NOT make their casting decision out of fear or discomfort of working with someone with a disability OR worry that they cannot find an actor that can authentically represent the character.

Part 2: Resources

ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities

Universal Design New York

https://www.respectability.org/hollywood-inclusion/

Inclusion in the Creative Workplace and Inclusive HR Toolkit
https://www.workinculture.ca/Resources/Inclusion-in-the-Creative-Workplace/Inclusive-HR-Toolkit

Mixed Blood Theatre Script Club
https://mixedblood.com/event/script-club/all/

NEA Roundtable: Creating Opportunities for Deaf Actors
https://www.arts.gov/about/publications/nea-roundtable-creating-opportunities-deaf-theater-artists

GRAEAE Theatre Company: A Guide to Inclusive Teaching Practice in Theatre
PART 3: So You Want to Work in Theater

This section focuses on providing tips and resources for people with disabilities interested in working in theaters and performing arts environments.

Building a Resume and Training

To be an actor, you need training! The best actors train all their lives. Just like learning any other instrument, learning to act and crafting your skill takes a lot of work.

“You need to be trained. You need to be ready. You need to be skilled, highly skilled. Not less skilled, more skilled. You literally have to be more skilled than everybody else because you’re going to have to fight through a lot of bias if you want to be an artist and work in our industry, or in the theater. You’ve got to bring skill to the stage.”

- Eileen Grubba

Formal Training- Training From Theatre Organizations and Schools

- Attend university or community college classes in the theater arts.
- Many local theaters have classes and training courses that you can sign up for. This is a great way to get experience and training as well as get to know people working at and involved with that particular theatre company.
- Volunteer with or audition for community theater. Google your city and community theater to find organizations close to you. Below are some Florida community theatres but there are many more.

- Amelia Community Theatre
- Area Stage Company
- Bay Street Players
- Carrollwood Cultural Center- MAS Community Theatre
- Celebration Theatre Company
- Central Florida Community Arts
- Cocoa Village Playhouse
- Florida Children’s Theatre
- Gulfshore Playhouse
- Horizon West Theatre Company
- Icehouse Theatre
- Limelight Theatre
- Live Oak Theatre Company
- The Naples Players
- Naples Performing Arts Center
- New Tampa Players- Penguin Project
- Opera Orlando
- Orange Park Community Theatre
- Orlando Repertory Theatre
- Osceola Arts
- Plant City Entertainment
- Playwrights’ Round Table
• For those interested in stage crafts, intern with a theater.
• The theatre experts interviewed for this toolkit mentioned a variety of organizations that provide training which they found to be disability-friendly. Many of these organizations provide in-person and virtual classes.
  • [The Alliance Theatre's Education Program](#) in Atlanta is very comprehensive and has programs for all ages and levels of skill.
  • [HB Studio](#) in New York City offers programs for all levels, young to professional. Auditions are required for those seeking to enroll in classes above level 1.
  • [Performing Arts Studio West](#) (PASW) provides hands-on individualized training, career management, and on-location support for performers with intellectual disabilities working in film, television, and commercials.
  • [The Miracle Project](#) provides individuals with autism and other disabilities tools to build communication, social skills, community, and greater self-esteem through inclusive theater, film and expressive arts programs. This acclaimed arts program was documented in the HBO double Emmy Award-winning documentary, “AUTISM: THE MUSICAL”.
  • In New York City or Los Angeles, you can audition for [The Actor’s Studio](#). The Actors Studio is a unique theatre workshop where members gather together to work on their craft in private through moderated sessions, workshops, and readings. You must audition to get accepted into The Actor’s Studio and this is a VERY difficult and competitive process. There is a waitlist to even get an audition. Click here for more information about the [audition process](#).
Informal Training- Learning on Your Own

- Watch YouTube training videos from organizations like Performing Arts Studio West
- Become familiar with websites that are specific to your interests:
  - The Black and Blue (camera assistants)
  - Stage Managers Association
  - Theatrical Sound Designers and Composers Association
  - International Organisation of Scenographers Theatre Architects and Technicians (stage design)
  - The Association of Lighting Designers
- Join social media groups and other organizations with similar interests:
  - The Divas With Disabilities Project: This campaign is bringing together women of color with disabilities throughout the world to reject and discredit stereotyped imagery historically portrayed by mass media. Its mission is to help shape the perception of what “disability” looks like by promoting women of color through various media platforms.
  - Trained Actors with Real Disabilities for Film & TV Facebook group
- Read books including authors like Eric Morris and Uta Hagen and topics like the Strasberg method.
- Create and film your own work. Participate in amateur film contests like the Easter Seals Disability Film Challenge. The Easterseals Disability Film Challenge gives filmmakers, with and without disabilities, the opportunity to collaborate to tell unique stories that showcase disability in its many forms. The film challenge is a weekend-long filmmaking contest that provides a platform for new voices in the entertainment industry. Challenge winners receive invaluable access to entertainment professionals, opening the door to an industry notoriously difficult to enter.
- Submit yourself for non-paid gigs like student films.
- Find a mentor to help you.

Finding Jobs

Go to as many open auditions as possible, as long as you think you are a good fit for the role. You may not get the job, but people come to know you and future roles come from people knowing you.

“The more we show up, the more it’s hard for them to say no to us.”

– Anita Hollander
Online Job Postings

- **Backstage magazine** - has open and Equity calls (Equity is the U.S. labor union that represents more than 51,000 professional Actors and Stage Managers).
- **Actors Access** - allows actors to maintain profiles by uploading headshots, résumés, videos, and more, and receive info on calls.
- **LA Casting** - allows actors to maintain profiles by uploading headshots, résumés, videos, and more, and receive info on calls.
- **Playbill** - has acting, tech, and admin job postings.
- **Ability Magazine** - abilityE is a talent source for the entertainment industry

Other Ways to Get Jobs

- Look for theatre or performing arts organizations in your area that are committed to diversity. Search a company's mission statement online. If they specifically mention "inclusion" or "diversity", reach out to their artistic director or other leadership. Send your resume, identify yourself as an artist with a disability, and ask how you can get involved.
- Join local, state, or regional theater alliances
  - South Florida Theatre League
  - Theatre Alliance of Greater Jacksonville
  - Florida Theatrical Association
  - Theatre Tampa Bay
  - Southeastern Theatre Conference
- Look into getting representation (an agent)
  - KMR Talent has a diversity division. Information on submitting can be found here.
  - C Talent represents high profile artists with disabilities globally.
- Look into voiceover work. Producers/directors of voiceover work are not always looking for someone with that perfect radio voice, they may be looking for people with unique voices that stand out because that is what stands out to people. Also, voiceover work may not have some of the accessibility issues that could come along with film/live theatre work.

One of the silver linings of COVID-19 has been the rise of Zoom projects and readings. Take advantage of this! “Please disabled actors hear me out - take advantage right now of the Zoom revolution. Attend everything you can attend and volunteer to be involved as an audience member or performer. Because you don’t have to get in the car and drive to Orlando anymore. You can hop on Zoom and meet everybody and you don’t have to worry about accessibility. All those tricky logistics just fly away!”

- Katie Calahan
Getting Jobs

There are two important components of getting a gig—your acting resume/headshot and the audition. Without the resume and headshot, a casting director isn’t going to remember your face or name.

Your Headshot, Resume, and/or Portfolio

Headshot

- Your headshot is an investment, so you should expect to pay a photographer or reach out to friends or family members that have photography experience.
- Make sure your headshot looks like you. If you dye or cut your hair, you may need to consider getting a new photo.
- Make sure you have good lighting and natural make up (yes, even you gentlemen!).
- Make sure you are dressed professionally in colors that compliment your skin, hair, and eye color, and keep your background simple. You should be the focus of the photo!

Resume

- Make sure the information on your resume is accurate, especially your contact information.
- Actors should include physical descriptions of themselves on their resumes (i.e. height, hair color, etc.) and this can include your disability, if you choose to disclose. Your resume is a one page distillation of everything you bring to the table; be proud of the unique perspective that you offer.
- List any credits you have in reverse-chronological order with your most recent work listed first.
- Include any performing arts education or training you’ve completed.
- If you are new to the performing arts and still building a resume, that’s ok. Don’t feel pressured to bulk up your resume and DEFINITELY don’t lie. If you only have a few credits, consider adding references, other kinds of training you have done (dance classes, music lessons, even computer classes) or a section on your special skills and interests (i.e. cooking, sewing, social media, etc.), anything that allows them to get a sense of who you are, how you work, and what you love.
- Print your resume on the back of your headshot to ensure it isn’t separated from your picture. If you’re unable to do this, staple or paste your resume to the back of your headshot.
Portfolio

- For positions that require a portfolio (photography, costume design, etc.), always start with your strongest shots/work.
- Keep the portfolio video to a minute/minute and a half max.

How to Conduct a Good Audition or Interview

“I think it’s really important to present yourself in your monologue. Walking into an audition a lot of actors feel like ‘oh maybe I’m not what they’re looking for’. The truth is directors don’t know what they’re looking for until they actually see it in front of them so always come in as yourself. I like to do auditions as Vanessa (myself) in extraordinary circumstances. It’s always me in the monologue. You can’t make up a character and put it on. It has to be you in that situation, and then it’s authentic.”

- Vanessa Severo

- Be yourself and be confident.
- Be friendly. Be easy to work with. Be someone people would want to work with. (This doesn’t mean not asking for accommodations you need).
- If completing an audition by Zoom/video conferencing, make sure to have good lighting and a good camera/microphone.
- At an open call or cattle call (a mass audition for several projects or companies), don’t feel a need to present an outrageous character in your audition, just present yourself in your monologue. First off, there isn’t enough time to introduce and develop a character. And second, they are looking for people they want to work with, as opposed to an actor who fits a specific role.
- For actors with physical disabilities, be mindful of your physical activity levels on days you have auditions so as not to wear yourself out too quickly.
- Research the audition venue’s parking arrangements and make sure you know exactly where to find the accessible parking. Call the box office and ask if needed. Research the weather and how that may impact your travel to the audition. Arrive early, SUPER early if needed, to prevent unnecessary stress on the day of your audition.
- Confirm you know what type of audition it will be (cold readings vs memorized material vs improvised material) and prepare accordingly.
Requesting Reasonable Accommodations

“Make a list of things that you need (accommodations) and share that written list with whatever theater you join. They may not be able to meet all those needs, but at least they’re aware of this. For a lot of people with disabilities, these accommodations may be second nature to them, but if it’s a company that’s not used to doing them, they may not be thinking about those things. Write down any accommodations you may need and then follow up with a one on one conversation with somebody, the director or stage manager or somebody that you can read that list off to and explain the reasoning for each accommodation. Be up front and forward with what your needs are why you need them. A lot of times if you explain to somebody why you need that accommodation, it can be really helpful to them.”

- David Dauber

- Be upfront and open about your needs and provide specific solutions when you can. Ask for what you need but don’t demand more than you need. Prioritize what you need (accessible transportation) vs what you want (a limo).
- If you have questions or specific needs for an audition (i.e. is there a chair in the room? Can I get a large print script?), it’s just generally good practice to ask sooner rather than later, before the audition if possible.
- Ask for an orientation of the theater space. Highlight accessibility issues and bring a solution that will work for you.
• You are not required to disclose your disability. You can ask about things like parking, stairs, etc.; what type of environment you will be in for shooting-how far away, how you are getting there, bathrooms, etc.; and/or about the day to day operations and then disclose only if what they have available doesn’t meet your needs. Some things to potentially ask about:
  • Elevators
  • Accessible bathrooms, preferably with a shower
  • Costuming, including shoes. Ask to use own shoes (or have final say on shoes), if needed
  • A parking spot close to the building
  • Your preferred type of seating (higher stool-like chairs, hard surfaces, etc.) that you can easily get on and off of and the location of the seating in relation to sets
  • Having someone help you bring your bags in from and out to your car, if needed
  • Communication assistance
  • ASL interpreters
  • The format of written materials
  • Break schedules
• Be open to having discussions about how you (as a person with a disability) is being portrayed in a piece if necessary.

“I’ve had experiences where I’ve had an amazing casting, the job looks great... and the Director was brilliant but the choreographer still had this old-school dwarf stereotype in his head. So he starts choreographing me that way. And I find myself going 'I've got to have this conversation...do you know what you mean when you’re getting me to do this - like - do you understand the broader context?’ This is a hard conversation because as an actor, I’m thinking, 'Am I being difficult? Do I just not want to do the work... Is that why I’m saying no? Or am I saying “no” because legitimately my body politics and humanity is being completely undermined by this “art”.

I was very lucky, the way it turned out. [The Director’s] way of fixing it - which actually did work - was to just swap my choreographed pathway with another actress who doesn’t have my impairment, which completely solved the problem. You get a non-disabled cis white actress to do what I was doing and it reads completely differently and there’s no problem because her body doesn’t come with the association that mine has projected onto it. I became a performer because I wanted to explore the human condition. I did not want to reinforce preexisting prejudices.”

– Kiruna Stamell
Rehearsals and Performances

“I have to think differently about how to do things on stage or interpret stage directions. I have to think of new ways to do things. The stage direction could read ‘He walks swiftly across the room and bounces onto the bed’, so I have to figure out, as a person in a wheelchair, what is my equivalent to that stage direction? Maybe its quickly rolling to the bed and transferring into it. I have to ask myself, ‘What’s important about this movement?’ And then you and your director have to figure out what works best to capture that or express it.”

– David Dauber

Rehearsals

- Make sure you are well rested and focused going into a rehearsal and leave any negativity at the door. Maintain a positive attitude and come ready to work.
- Scheduled rehearsals should not be the only time you work on your material. As an actor, you must be prepared to allot a few hours of your free time every week to studying lines or music, reviewing staging, and preparing for rehearsals.
- Figure out what memorization techniques work best for you. If you work best with a partner, get a friend or family member to commit time to work with you. If you work best alone, schedule time to yourself to specifically work on memorization. DON’T WAIT TILL THE LAST MINUTE TO MEMORIZE YOUR LINES! It is a process that takes time.

Performances

- When in performance, make sure you are well rested! Schedules can be very strenuous. Make sure you have plenty of downtime to rest and recuperate. Do not overbook yourself with other obligations and activities.
- Double and triple check the performance schedule. Make sure you know when you need to be at the theater and have a plan for how you are getting there.
- Be consistent. Do the play you rehearsed. Do not feel the need to change or adjust your performance based on feedback from the audience or to keep things fresh.
- Do not let negative reviews or opinions get to you or disrupt your performance; if you feel like they will, do not read them or put yourself in a position to hear them.
“You gotta really be passionate about this because it’s hard. There’s a lot of competition. Everybody wants to be a star and pursue their dreams. So define your dreams for you. If you want to be a dancer, whether you use a wheelchair or not, go for it. Be the best dancer that you can and work and train just like people that are athletes. Exercise and take classes. Keep up your skills. That’s so important. And probably the most important thing is don’t give up. Like I said, it’s a hard field; it’s hard to be in and you’ve got to learn how to accept no for an answer. But keep going. There will be a yes there someday. Just keep pushing forward.”

– David Dauber

Part 3: Resources

Facebook:

Trained Actors with Real Disabilities for Film & TV
https://www.facebook.com/TrainedActorsWhoAreDifferent/

Divas with Disabilities
https://www.facebook.com/groups/divaswithdisabilities

Year of the Stage Manager
https://www.facebook.com/groups/709114496283521/

Training:

The Alliance Theatre’s Education Program
https://alliancetheatre.org/content/education

HB Studio
https://hbstudio.org

Performing Arts Studio West
https://www.pastudiowest.com/index.html
YouTube - https://www.youtube.com/user/PASWTV

The Miracle Project
http://www.themiracleproject.org

The Actor’s Studio
https://theactorsstudio.org/who-we-are/about-the-actors-studio/

Lights, Camera, Action 2.0 (much of this appears to be on hold due to the pandemic)
http://einsofcommunications.com/lights-camera-access-2-0/
Resource Websites:

The Black and Blue  
https://www.theblackandblue.com

Stage Managers Association  
https://www.stagemanagers.org

Theatrical Sound Designers and Composers Association  
https://tsdca.org/

International Organisation of Scenographers Theatre Architects and Technicians (stage design)  
https://www.oistat.org/

The Association of Lighting Designers  
https://www.ald.org.uk/

Searching for Jobs:

Backstage magazine  
https://www.backstage.com

Actors Access  
https://actorsaccess.com

LA Casting  
https://corp.castingnetworks.com/la/talent/

Playbill  
https://www.playbill.com/jobs

Ability Magazine  
https://abilitymagazine.com/abilitye-talent-source-for-the-entertainment-industry/

Other:

Easterseals Disability Film Challenge  
https://disabilityfilmchallenge.com

South Florida Theatre League  
https://southfloridatheatre.org

Theatre Alliance of Greater Jacksonville  
https://www.facebook.com/theatrealliancejax/
Florida Theatrical Association
https://floridatheatrical.org

Theatre Tampa Bay
https://theatretampabay.org

Southeastern Theatre Conference
https://www.setc.org

Community Theaters:

Amelia Community Theatre
https://www.ameliacommunitytheatre.org/auditions

Area Stage Company
https://www.areastage.org/auditions

Bay Street Players
https://eustisstatetheatre.org/audition/

Carrollwood Cultural Center- MAS Community Theatre
https://carrollwoodcenter.org/events/theatre/auditions/

Celebration Theatre Company
https://www.celebrationtheatreco.com/getinvolved

Central Florida Community Arts
https://cfcarts.com/about-2/auditions/

Cocoa Village Playhouse
https://cocoavillageplayhouse.com/auditions

Florida Children’s Theatre
https://www.flct.org/auditions/

Gulfshore Playhouse
https://www.gulfshoreplayhouse.org/about/work-with-us/

Horizon West Theatre Company
https://www.horizonwesttheatercompany.com

Icehouse Theatre
http://www.icehousetheatre.com/auditions

Limelight Theatre
https://limelight-theatre.org/auditions/
Live Oak Theatre Company  
https://www.liveoaktheatre.org/gallery

Magic Curtain Productions  
https://www.magiccurtain.net/get-involved

Melbourne Civic Theatre  
https://www.mymct.org/auditions

MNM Theatre Company  
https://www.mnmtheatre.org/jobs

The Naples Players  
https://naplesplayers.org/join-us/upcoming-auditions/

Naples Performing Arts Center  
http://naplesperformingartscenter.com/category/shows/auditions/

New Tampa Players- Penguin Project  
https://www.newtampaplayers.org/penguinproject

Opera Orlando  
https://operaorlando.org/auditions

Orange Park Community Theatre  
https://www.opct.info/get-involved

Orlando Repertory Theatre  
https://www.orlandorep.com/get-involved/auditions/

Osceola Arts  
https://www.osceolaarts.org/auditions

Plant City Entertainment  
http://www.pceshows.com/auditions-3/

Playwrights’ Round Table  
https://www.theprt.com/create-with-us
A special thank you to all the theater experts who assisted with developing this toolkit.

**Katie Calahan** is a native Floridan actor who received her classical training and BFA in Theatre Studies from Boston University and also completed BU’s “Los Angeles Certificate Program: Acting in Hollywood” program. She has acted in a wide variety of film, television, and theatre programs, including at the debut Tribeca Theater Festival as one of her favorite characters Cripperella in “Cripperella or the Cracked Glass Slipper”. To see her latest work, stream episodes of “Cripperella in Quarantine” at [www.jobsitetheater.org](http://www.jobsitetheater.org).

**Ophira Calof** is a multi-award winning Disabled writer, performer, and producer based in Tkaronto (Toronto). Her work weaves together music, comedy, and storytelling, centering disability and chronic illness experience. She co-created the sketch comedy revue “Generally Hospital” (Canadian Comedy Award Nominee, Patron’s Pick), and her solo show, “Literally Titanium”, was developed through the Buddies in Bad Times Emerging Creator’s Unit before premiering at the 2020 Next Stage Theatre Festival. Ophira also works as a curator, workshop facilitator, consultant, and keynote speaker with projects including COVID-19 through a Disability Lens: Storytelling and Filmmaking Project, Laugh With RAFF: A night of disability comedy, and Bad Dog Theatre’s 5th annual Our Cities On Our Stages Diversity and Inclusion Symposium.

**David Dauber** loves acting and entertaining both in live theatre and film. Even though he was born with cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair in his daily life, that doesn’t stop him from pursuing his dream of becoming an Oscar-winning performer. He has loved acting since performing high school and college theatre in the 1980s and 1990s. He is the co-host and co-producer of “The Gene and Dave Show” and can be seen on the Netflix original series, “Special”. He has done extra work alongside Nicolas Cage, Al Pacino, and Holly Hunter. Connect with David on his website at [www.daviddauber.com](http://www.daviddauber.com).

**Detour Company Theatre** provides authentic theater experiences for adults with cognitive and physical disabilities. They are committed to sharing the joy of theater through programming that supports existing skills and facilitates the development of new ones. As a resource to the community, they welcome both those who want to work in the field of arts and disability, and those who are eager to celebrate the talent, creativity and artistic potential of all people.
Terry Galloway is a deaf lesbian writer, performer, and director who writes, directs, and performs. Her memoir “Mean Little deaf Queer”, was a Lambda Award Finalist, and the winner of the Golden Crown Award for non-fiction. In Tallahassee, Terry co-founded and is the Artistic Director of “The Mickee Faust Club”, a community theater for the weird, queer, and disability communities. Terry was a founding member of “Esther’s Follies”, the most popular cabaret in Austin, Texas; and the creator and co-founder of “Actual Lives Austin”, a writing and performance workshop for adults with disabilities. In New York City, her solo performances were produced in venues ranging from the American Place Theater to W.O.W. Café and for several years she toured with the NY’s famed P.S. 122 Field Trips. Deaf since the age of nine, Terry received cochlear implants and promptly wrote a musical, “The Ugly Girl”, which toured the UK with an international cast of women with disabilities. She has also written the libretto for an opera, “Lardo Weeping”, commissioned by Austin’s LOLA Opera Company. Terry has received grants and awards in theater, literature, radio, and video from the NEA, the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs, the Texas Institute of Letters, the Kennedy Center, and the Public Broadcasting Corporation.

Eileen Grubba is an award-winning actress, lifetime member of The Actors Studio, member of the Television Academy, and Brand Ambassador for Global Disability Inclusion. Her TV appearances include “Watchmen”, “SWAT”, “Criminal Minds”, “New Amsterdam”, “The Politician”, “Sons of Anarchy”, “Bones”, and many more. Eileen has won multiple Best Actress awards for Indie films. She was honored with the WeSpark Award at the Idyllwild Film Festival 2020 for social impact on the entertainment industry and won the Mary Austin Excellence in Screenwriting Awards in 2019 and 2020, as well as many awards for her disability-inclusive short films. She is an advocate for the hiring of performers with disabilities in film, television and advertising, serves on the SAG/AFTRA National PWD Committee, and was selected for the 2020 CBS Leadership Pipeline for directing. She is a national public speaker for events supporting challenged patients, disability inclusion, eradicating bullying, and empowering women. Eileen narrowly survived a viral attack on her spine caused by a vaccine that left her paralyzed. She spent years of her childhood in a wheelchair, and every year since trying to stay on her feet. She is also a cancer survivor.

Anita Hollander, SAG-AFTRA National Chair of Performers with Disabilities, has written and performed work throughout Europe, Asia, Russia, and America, in film, TV, and live theatre. Her award-winning original solo musicals “Still Standing” and “Spectacular Falls” have played Off-Broadway, at the Kennedy Center, White House, nationally and internationally. Anita also works with Actors Equity, Broadway League, Dramatists Guild, ASCAP, WGA, CSA, PGA, AMPTP and ReelAbilities Film Festival promoting greater diversity in all media.

James Ian is an actor, singer, songwriter, speaker, and writer. A Maryland native, James now resides in Los Angeles where he continues to pursue his passion for art, all while advocating for authentic disability representation in the arts and entertainment industry. He loves discussing all things disability, and James himself has two disabilities (Spinal Muscular Atrophy Type 3, which is a neuromuscular disorder, and Parsonage-Turner Syndrome, which is a neurological disorder). His pronouns are he/him/his.
Brent Johnson graduated from the Academy of Art: San Francisco in 2013 and received his Bachelor’s of Science in Motion Pictures and Television with an emphasis in Classical Cinematography. He has lensed two feature films and numerous short films, “Jezebel” is an award-winning drama on Netflix, directed by Numa Perrier. Brent is a 3-time award-winning Airborne NASA cinematographer and Silver Medal of Achievement recipient for his efforts on collecting data on the Hayabusa 2 spacecraft re-entry, the SpaceX Dragon 2 In-Flight abort test, and for non-disclosed NASA operations.

Diana Elizabeth Jordan is an actor, solo artist, theater and filmmaker, disability influencer, and artist educator. She has appeared in over 60 theater productions and worked in film and television. She also directs, is an artist educator, disability influencer and is a member of SAG-AFTRA and Actors Equity Association.

Elbert Joseph, also known as EJ, is a Deaf actor who is fluent in both American Sign Language as well as spoken English. EJ started acting when he was thirteen and his passion turned into a career. He received professional theatrical training at the Boston Arts Academy and has worked with several award-winning theaters in the Boston area including American Repertory Theater, Huntington Theatre, and Wheelock Family Theatre. EJ is a professional actor who is funny, good-hearted, smart, and passionate. He dreams of transforming lives and inspiring the world through his craft. EJ believes success is found in collaboration, desire for personal growth, and the constant pursuit of new opportunities.

Whitney Mitchell is a costume designer from Dallas, Texas. In November 2010, when she was 18 years old and pursuing dancing and acting in college, she fell ill and developed flu-like symptoms that resulted in Sepsis (an infection of the blood). This severe illness damaged her arms and legs, resulting in having all four of her limbs amputated in order to save her life. Whitney had been interested in drawing and sewing since she was a teenager. When she began sewing and realized she was good at it, she knew this was something that she wanted to do for the rest of her life. Whitney said, “Finding clothing when you are disabled is quite annoying sometimes and I was thinking how there should be a market towards people like me or anyone who has a disability to be able to find clothes that are fashionable and easy to maneuver. Clothes that are customized to fit any person.”

Zazel-Chavah O’Garra (she/her) is a brain tumor survivor, disability advocate, social worker, dancer, actress, model, and founder and artistic director of ZCO/DANCEPROJECT. Zazel holds a Master’s degree in social work from Fordham University, and currently works with the Brain Injury Association of New York State and YAI/National Institute for people with disabilities. Zazel became a disabled artist 18 years ago. Having faith pushed her to “dance beyond a disability.” She shares the resurrection as a disabled artist by creating customized movements for persons with mixed abilities; demonstrating directly that physical challenges need not limit a passion for living a fulfilling life. Before founding the ZCO/DANCEPROJECT, Zazel established a thriving career in the performing arts. Her body of work included performances on the concert stage, Broadway, Off-Broadway, European Tours, national commercials and magazine publications.
Elizabeth Salisch is the AEA Production Stage Manager and Company Manager at the Greenbrier Valley Theatre in Lewisburg, WV. A graduate of the University of Pittsburgh with a Theatre Arts degree, her past experiences include stage managing educational shows for the George Street Playhouse and Theatreworks USA in both schools and venues of varying sizes up and down the East Coast. Elizabeth has also stage managed mainstage productions including the George Street Playhouse, Theatre By The Sea, TheatreZone, and various other regional theatres.

Vanessa Severo has studied at Missouri State University, as well as The American Conservatory Theatre, San Francisco. She is the recipient of the TCG 11th Round of the Fox Foundation resident Actor Fellowships, 2017. She has performed for the past 12 seasons at The Kansas City Repertory Theatre, and is certified in Suzuki Method, and Viewpoints under the instruction of Ellen Lauren, SITI company. She is the playwright and actor of “Frida...A Self Portrait” (2020 Kilroys List), a one woman production about the tumultuous and brilliant life of Frida Kahlo. Vanessa is passionate about utilizing the element of Suzuki method in her work to challenge the boundaries of storytelling, and explore the depths of movement, composition, and the power of stillness.

Christopher Smit (he/him), PhD (University of Iowa), and Jill Vyn (she/her), MSW (University of Michigan) co-founded DisArt in 2015, an organization committed to advancing a cultural understanding of disability. By taking disability out of the space of speculation, mystery, or fear, and placing it in an historical and aesthetic context, DisArt amplifies the voice, visibility, and value of the disability community. Through public speaking, publication, cutting-edge programming, and and organizational consulting, Christopher and Jill have become respected voices throughout the world.

Kiruna Stamell is an actress, producer, and disability rights advocate. She has worked professionally across Australia and Europe for over 20 years, with extensive experience in theatre, film and television. During the pandemic, Kiruna has had to apply her ingenuity to creating connections with new audiences and so has developed an online children’s theatre production with her husband and business partner ‘Pirate and Parrot’ (www.youtube.com/c/PirateandParrotTV).

Dr. Donna R. Walton is the founder of the Divas With Disabilities Project, a non-profit organization with the mission to bring attention to the lack of representation of Black, and Brown women and girls with visible disabilities in the mass media industry. Dr. Walton has made an unprecedented impact in disability and women of color communities as a hub for thoughtful discussion on issues related to empowerment, accessibility, and authentic representation in all forms of media. She also is producing a film documentary “Divas with Disabilities” that explores the lived experiences of African America women who live with physical disability in the United States.