



# ReelAbilities

## Accessible Venue Guide, 2022

We know you're committed to ensuring that everyone in your audience can experience a show or an event to its very fullest. To achieve this goal, it's important to make accessibility an integral part of the event. This useful guide offers suggestions and best practice tips for effectively communicating your accessibility offerings before, during, and after an event at your venue.



### 1. Communication is key!

Before the entertainment even begins, let's make sure to "set the stage" by making people feel welcomed and at ease - before and during the event.

- It's always encouraged to ask an individual about their preferences. This gives people the opportunity to tell you exactly what's best for them. It's the most effective way to offer your support.
- If you're speaking to someone who uses an interpreter or assistant, it's respectful to speak directly to the person whom you're addressing - not their interpreter or assistant.
- Naturally, it's important to respect an individual's space and never touch someone without their permission. This includes a person's wheelchair, walker, cane, etc. Many individuals with disabilities regard these tools as extensions of their personal space. For example, if you see someone using a wheelchair, please don't start pushing the chair without their consent. Ask first whether they need help.
- If you think someone needs help:
  - Ask if the individual or group needs help.
  - If so, ask what help they need; then follow their instructions.



## 2. Get the word out.

Long before anyone arrives at an event, marketing materials are a great way to connect with the disability community. Let them know about your event's accessibility offerings. Share your material with local community centers, disability advocacy/support groups, and social media networks.

- Marketing should include film descriptions and appropriate warnings (e.g., violence, loud noises, flashing lights, sexual assault etc.) All digital communications should be compatible with screen readers.
- Audiences might want to research a venue in advance to make sure their needs will be met - and to prepare for the experience. Information should be available, and include details about
  - all accessibility offerings
  - limitations (e.g., if there is no audio description available, etc.).
  - availability of sensory-friendly performances
  - tours of the space.
  - restroom information (including clear indications of their locations and if there are family/individual restrooms available).
  - emergency exits
  - service animals policies - and clear details for owners about relief areas.
- People with specific needs welcome the opportunity to ask questions prior to their arrival. Create an "ASK US A QUESTION!" open channel on your digital platforms. Then, clearly indicate it on your website, flyers, social media posts, and other communication platforms.
- For online and/or advanced ticket purchasing, indicate if
  - there is telephone access for ticket ordering and answering questions about the ticketing process.
  - there are certain presentations that are captioned, sensory friendly/relaxed viewing, offer audio descriptions etc.
  - patrons can select seats when purchasing a ticket.





- It's helpful to indicate options for wheelchair accessibility, proximity to exits, proximity to the screen, etc.
- Maintain a database to share future accessible events with patrons who might be interested. Ask if they'd like to be added to a mailing list.
- Ask individuals their communication preferences (such as email, phone calls, mailings, etc.) so they can receive information about upcoming events.

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### 3. Once people decide to attend the event, they must get there.

- To help your patrons prepare for the trip, make sure that all of your communications include information about public transportation and driving directions. Also, include accessible parking information and other accessible offerings (for example, if a parking garage has an elevator.)
- It's also important to clearly communicate where the venue's accessible entrances are located and if there are ramps, automatic doors, or a staff member to assist with opening doors.

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### 4. Your guests have arrived!

Let's go over a few touchpoints before the event begins.

- Your accessibility offerings should be clearly marked with signage around the venue in easy-to-read large print.
- Since many patrons will be purchasing tickets in person, make sure all the accessible information you featured online is also available at the ticketing counter (info about each film/program, proper warnings and descriptions etc.). Remember to include information about seat selection, wheelchair accessibility, proximity to exits, and proximity to screen, etc.
- If your venue sells drinks and snacks, display a list of their ingredients that includes allergy information.
- If the event has programs/pamphlets/printed materials, there should be options for people with reading challenges, including large print, braille, and audio.





## 5. It's time to enter "The Room Where it Happens."

- It's helpful to make sure that accessibility offerings are clearly marked in a theater - including accessible seats and assistive devices. And, of course, exit signs should be clearly marked.
- Some events include pre/post show programming, so audiences should know how they can best enjoy this additional programming. If there's a live presentation, be sure to communicate the different accessibility offerings such as live captioning (e.g. CART) or other options (e.g. interpreters, etc.).
- Presenters should be positioned in an area that is easy to see from different vantage points in the audience.
- Accompanying materials (e.g. video, PowerPoint, etc.) should be offered with captions, audio description, or other requested accessibility needs.
- Dedicated staff who assist patrons are always appreciated.

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## 6. When it's time to leave.

- People with specific needs might have to exit the theater during the film or live performance because they need a break. Please provide clearly marked alternative areas that are quieter, and not as dark.
- Provide clearly marked and illuminated exits, pathways in a dark room, and alternative exits such as stairless options.

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## 7. Until we meet again...

After audience members have left the event, stay in touch with them. Send them follow-up communications, thank you messages, questionnaires, invitations to future events, and more.

- Use what you've learned about accessible digital communication so your patrons can find out more about future accessible events.

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## 8. Resources to learn more:



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