

STEP 4: CREATE AN ACCESS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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Guidance on the Creation and Use of An Access Advisory Committee

While there are many successful methods to ensure that access is provided, such as focus groups, task forces, and individual or team consultancies, **an Access Advisory Committee can be an effective method to develop ongoing technical assistance for your organization and constituents.**

The concept of an "Access Advisory Committee" can be very broad. All of the members of the Advisory Committee may not necessarily have to meet at one time. These advisors may serve as a core resource group, which may be contacted on a one-on-one basis or by phone most of the time; **however, it is highly recommended that they meet at least once a year, and more often if possible.**

Membership of the Advisory Committee may change over time. Subcommittees could be formed to work on creating focused access programs and projects. **Each agency should create an Advisory Committee network that is responsive to their agency's particular needs and planning strategies.**

Networking is the most important means of getting sound advice. This concept is not new: it is only through direct consultation with the targeted audiences that outreach or audience development will be truly successful.

Composition of the Access Advisory Committee

In general, the Access Advisory Committee should consist of board member(s), executive director, program directors, Accessibility Coordinator, and consultants who represent and/or have disabilities. The consultants may be artists, cultural administrators, educators, accessibility experts, interested legislators, participants and audience members. **It is extremely important to gain the expertise of a person who uses a wheelchair, who is blind, who is deaf, or hard of hearing, who has a learning disability, or who has speech or motor coordination difficulty; these individuals will be able to give the best advice about what is needed for increased accessibility.** Bear in mind that individuals with similar disabilities do not always share the same opinions and/or needs.

The board should officially establish the Advisory Committee in order to have any impact on policy, decision-making and day-to-day agency operations. **Remember that advisory committee can only advise; the board must approve action. The Advisory Committee should make recommendations for action to the board.** It is strongly recommended that all boards include a member with a disability or a disability access advocate.

Strive for diversity of committee members. Advisors should be recruited from and reflect the agency's community, including people of color, individuals with various disabilities and older adults. Reinforce the idea that the Advisory Committee can double as a multiculturalism task force.

It is imperative to gain advice from **qualified** people within the community to properly implement access accommodations.

Example: Independent Living Centers provide many services, including surveying facilities and recommending architects/engineers with reliable access expertise.

All members of the Access Advisory Committee are ultimately advocates of disability issues.

Functions and Goals of the Access Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee exists to:

- Assist in evaluating the accessibility of an agency's facilities, programs and services;
- Make recommendations for needed improvements;

- Provide guidance in developing access policy and a plan for action;
- Provide guidance and/or assistance with technical issues and funding sources to implement access improvements;
- Serve as an access resource and review mechanism, which may include consultation on new programs, policies and services;
- Assist in educating staff, board and grantees concerning disability services and access issues, which may include conducting awareness seminars and participating on conference panels and workshops;
- Assist grantees/constituents with access referrals, which may include developing a resource manual on local services and equipment; and
- Assist in developing outreach to people in the community who are older or have disabilities, i.e. ways to participate in arts and humanities activities; provide assistance in finding what programs are available in their city and state; and advertise what your arts organization has to offer them.

Finding Access Advisory Committee Members

The following resource directories or organizations may assist you in finding advisory group members in your state.

State Resources The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) compiles disability resources in each state serving children and youth with disabilities; state chapters of disability organizations and parent groups; parent training and information projects.

State Agencies and Organizations for ADA Compliance and Technical Assistance

The National Arts and Disability Center publishes state directories that include disability agencies and organizations for creating an access and advisory committee or conducting outreach to the disability community.

VSA is a national and international organization that creates learning opportunities through the arts for people with disabilities. It carries out its range of programs through a network of affiliates.

Planning for Your Access Advisory Meeting

This section contains information on how to plan for and conduct an accessible advisory committee meeting. Considerations include:

- Budgeting
- Invitation
- Transportation and Location
- Setting an Agenda
- Communication

Budgeting

The costs of your access advisory meetings should be worked into the annual budget of your organization or agency. Advisory consultants should receive travel expenses, per diem and/or honorarium if your agency provides such for other panelists/consultants. Generally, consultants are more reliable when support and/or expenses are provided, and it encourages greater accountability.

Budget considerations may also include teleconference costs, print material and potential accommodation services including alternative formats such as Braille or sign language interpreter. Your agency must provide and pay for advisors' access accommodations, such as an assistive listening system, readers, or sign language interpreter.

Invitation

Your invitation to attend an access advisory board meeting should inquire whether any services and/or accommodations are needed to participate in the meeting.

Transportation and Location

Meetings must be held in an accessible location, taking into consideration parking as well as accessible public transportation.

Setting an Agenda

Make sure your meeting has a clear, stated purpose that all participants know and understand. Write an agenda organized to achieve that purpose and circulate it before the meeting. Be clear about the objective or desired outcome of the meeting. At the beginning of the meeting briefly review the agenda with the group and adjust it, if necessary to accommodate new and relevant items. Focus participants by giving them a time for discussing agenda items.

The following is a sample meeting agenda of the **West Virginia Accessibility to the Arts Advisory Committee**.

**Accessibility to the Arts Advisory Committee
November 16, 2001**

9:00 - 9:30	Optional Bagels and Coffee
9:30 - 9:50	Introductions & why are we here?
9:50 - 10:30	How do we identify professional artists with disabilities? Group consensus of 4 or 5 ideas
10:30 - 11:15	What should the priorities be for recommendation to WVDCH/WVCA? Group consensus of 4 or 5 ideas
11:15 - 11:25	Quick break
11:25 - 11:55	What types of information and resources are the most important and useful to our constituents? Group consensus of 4 or 5 ideas
11:55 - 12:00	Brief discussion of accessibility/ADA workshop and call for volunteers for subcommittee
12:00 - 12:20	Summarize -what did we just say? How often do we meet? Where do we go from here?
12:20 - 12:30	Trash, gas and ice.... Travel reimbursement forms etc.

Communication

Ensure that any requested services such as a sign language interpreter, note taker, assistive listening device or alternative formats for written materials such as Braille or large print materials are provided. The visual materials used during the meeting need to be accessible as well, such as any handouts, videos or overheads. In addition, attention must be paid to the communication techniques used in the meeting to ensure all participants comfort and involvement.

Use appropriate and current terminology when speaking with, writing about or referring to people with disabilities. It is important to use language that is respectful and

emphasizes the person, not the disability. This is referred to as “people-first” language and seeks to avoid generic labels such as “the disabled.”



National Endowment for the Arts
Office for Accessibility

Guidance for Writing and Speaking about People with Disabilities and Older Adults

People with disabilities and older adults, like other underserved groups, actively seek full civil rights including participation in cultural activities as creators, audiences, staff, board members, panelists, volunteers, teachers, and students.

The way you portray people in what you write or say may enhance their dignity and promote positive attitudes. For example, **refer to the person first, rather than a disability; this emphasizes a person's worth and abilities.**

Vocabularies change constantly, but the following five “NEVER USES” are here to stay.

- **NEVER USE the word “handicapped”**; the word is disability.
- **NEVER USE “disability” as an adjective.** For example, not “a blind writer,” but “a writer who is blind.” Focus on the person, NOT the disability.
- **NEVER USE “special”**; this separates the individual from the group. For example, information is not required regarding the “special needs of the group,” but “needs of the group” or “accommodations for individuals with disabilities.” Tours are not “special tours,” but “tours that include people with disabilities.”
- **NEVER USE euphemisms**, such as “physically challenged” or “handicapable.” These are condescending and suggest that barriers may be good or that disabilities exist to build the person’s character. The person has a disability.
- **NEVER USE labels: “the disabled,” “the blind,” “the deaf,” “A.B.s” (able-bodied); “T.A.B.s” (temporarily able-bodied); or “normal.”** Labeling people is never acceptable. “Able-bodied” is a relative, judgmental term. “Normal” implies that people with disabilities are not normal. Although most people have some

limitations, “non-disabled person” is acceptable in describing a person without disabilities.

Affirmative	Negative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with disabilities • A disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The handicapped • The impaired • The disabled • The unfortunate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person without disabilities • Non-disabled person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able bodied • Normal person • <i>This implies a person with a disability is not normal.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person who is blind • Person who is partially sighted or has low vision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The blind
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person who is deaf • Person who is hard-of-hearing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The deaf or deaf mute • Suffers a hearing loss • <i>“Suffers” dramatizes a disability.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person who uses a wheelchair • Person with limited mobility • <i>People use wheelchairs for mobility and freedom</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wheelchair bound • Confined or restricted to a wheelchair • Cripple
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person who has muscular dystrophy • Person who has multiple sclerosis • Person who had polio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stricken by MD • Afflicted by MS • Polio victim • <i>“Stricken,” “afflicted,” and “victim,” all imply helplessness, and emotionalize and sensationalize a person's disability.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person who does not speak • Non Verbal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dumb • Mute
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person with epilepsy • Person with a seizure disorder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Epileptic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person with learning disabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The learning disabled
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older person • Older adult • Mature adult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The aged • The elderly • Senior citizen
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person of short stature • Little people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dwarf • Diminutive person • Midget
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person who lives in a nursing home or long-term care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The infirmed • The institutionalized

Affirmative	Negative
institution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person who stays at home because of limited mobility, fragile health, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The homebound

See also: [Suggestions for Communicating, Working With and Writing About People with Disabilities](#) Iowa Arts Council.

Best Practices: Access Advisory Committees and Groups

Sample Letter for Membership on the Access Advisory Committee



October 23, 2001

Dear _____,

I am spearheading the Accessibility to the Arts Advisory Committee. The purpose of the committee is to lead West Virginia toward a universal or inclusive environment in the arts where programs, services, activities and employment are accessible to everyone, people with and without disabilities and people of all ages.

The goals are as follows: 1. Identify and attract professional artists with disabilities to the programs and services of the WV Commission on the Arts/ WV Division of Culture & History. 2. Develop a plan for recommendation to the WVCA & WVDCH relevant to achieving the purpose. 3. Provide constituents with information and resources necessary to assure that their programs/facilities are usable to all citizens. 4. Plan/Conduct Accessibility/ADA workshops throughout the state.

We plan to have four “face to face” meetings throughout the year and communicate via email

and telephone as needed. Your participation will be voluntary but your travel expenses will be reimbursed. Our first meeting is November 16, 2001, in Charleston at the Goodwill. I am including the meeting agenda. As promised, subsequent meetings will be held in other parts of the state.

Your contribution will be valuable to the Accessibility to the Arts Advisory Committee. If you have any questions or would like more information please call me at 304/558-0220, ext. 145 or email me.

Sincerely,

Coordinator
Arts in Education/504 ADA
West Virginia Division of Culture & History
West Virginia Commission on the Arts

Examples of Different Types of Access Advisory Committees and Groups

Florida Arts Council ADA Access Resolution Committee- Job Description

Established in 1995, the Florida Arts ADA Access Resolution Committee:

- Serves in an advisory capacity to the Florida Arts Council.
- Reviews and makes recommendations to the Florida Arts Council concerning resolution or consequences of ADA non-compliance with grantees.
- The Chairman of the ADA Resolution Committee is a current member of the Florida Arts Council.

Kentucky Arts Council Diversity Committee Statement of Purpose and Goals

The Kentucky Arts Council Diversity Committee is an ad hoc committee composed of volunteers representing the state's various special constituencies. The Committee's purpose is to advise the Arts Council on the most appropriate means by which to make its programs accessible to Kentucky's citizens, to assist in the development of new programs to serve constituencies and communities not currently reached by the Arts Council, and to promote positive intercultural relations among the state's various communities.

These constituencies include, but are not restricted to, the following:

- Persons of minority ethnic and racial groups
- Persons with disabilities
- Geographically or economically isolated communities
- Disadvantaged and at-risk persons
- Older Americans
- Persons in institutions
- Women
- Gay, lesbian and transgender communities

The Committee's advisory activities include the following:

- Assisting the Arts Council in the development of technical-assistance programs to aid Arts Council-funded organizations in their full compliance with civil-rights and Americans with Disabilities legislation;
- Advising on the best methods of designing and implementing audience development strategies that maximize the arts participation of underserved constituencies;
- Identifying additional underserved constituencies and suggesting the means by which these constituencies may be contacted and served by the Arts Council and/or its funded organizations;
- Providing the Arts Council with feedback, relevant to accessibility issues, on the design of program materials and information, such as grant applications, conference materials, agency newsletters and other announcements, the agency web site, etc.;
- Acting as an interface with other programs and organizations promoting accessibility in the state, the region, and the nation;
- Suggest special Arts Council initiatives to promote the inclusion in the arts of all the state's citizens;
- Assisting the Arts Council in the promotion of arts as a basic in education, and the awareness of the arts as an essential life experience;
- Assisting in the expansion of Kentuckians' understanding of the arts to include the state's diverse cultures.

Service on the Diversity Committee will entail attending semi-annual meetings in a centrally located site. Committee membership will be for one year. Invitations to committee membership will be made by the Arts Council on an annual basis.

MSAC ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY PANEL

Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) “Guide to Policies & Procedures Regarding Grantee Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities” (2002)

1. Purpose of the Panel

The MSAC Accessibility Advisory Panel is charged with the responsibility of reviewing and periodically revising the Maryland State Arts Council Guide to Policies & Procedures Regarding Grantee Accessibility For Persons With Disabilities. The Accessibility Advisory Panel also acts as a dispute resolution board to review unusual or difficult accessibility issues identified through the Accessibility Review Process.

2. Makeup of the Panel

The MSAC Accessibility Advisory Panel is a voluntary body. Members are appointed for three-year terms by the Council. The 504/ADA Coordinator acts as chairperson of the Panel. The Panel may be made up of individuals with an interest in arts and accessibility matters from the following groups:

- MSAC Staff
- Public
- People with disabilities
- Grantees
- Legal Specialists
- Accessibility Specialists

3. Meetings

The Accessibility Advisory Panel meets at least once a year (or as needed) at the call of the MSAC 504/ADA Coordinator.

New Jersey Arts Task Force

The New Jersey Arts Access Task Force was created in 1992 to assist all cultural arts organizations in making their programs and facilities accessible to individuals with disabilities. The Arts Access Task Force is comprised of individuals with specific knowledge and expertise in areas relating to accessible programming and facilities. Since its inception, the Arts Access Task Force has been a resource for New Jersey's Arts community to use as they make structural and programmatic changes in order to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). All of the Arts Access Task Force's programs and services are made possible by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of States, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.

The **New Jersey Arts Access Task Force** provides:

- **Technical Assistance Workshop-** These workshops, offered throughout New Jersey, provide training and technical information to assist in the creation of strong long-range ADA plans. Topics include architectural assessment, the development of accessible marketing publications, staff and board sensitivity training, and overview of the ADA plan.
- **Self-Assessment Surveys-** A user-friendly survey helps identify areas of your operation that are and are not accessible and what is readily achievable regarding access. The survey will also act as a guide as you develop your long-range ADA plan.
- **Referral and Information Services-** If you have specific questions with regards to sign-interpretation, architectural access, employment issues, etc. The Arts Access Task Force will provide appropriate information or the resources to find it.
- **Review of ADA Long-Range Plans-** Members of the Arts Access Task Force will review ADA plans prior to their submission to the New Jersey State Council and the Arts. Comments and suggestions will be made to applicants as to how they can improve the plan and what elements need clarification. (This service is available only to first time applicants to the NJSCA and does not guarantee the plan's approval by an independent panel review process.)
- **Cultural Access News-** This semi-annual publication informs the arts community about the latest advancements and accomplishments in arts accessibility in New Jersey and across the nation. Special features highlight valuable tools and programs that will assist in the implementation of your organization's ADA plan.

Ohio Arts Council

Ohio Arts Council formed their 504/ADA Advisory Committee in 1989, as a result of an in-depth survey that was conducted to identify artists with disabilities in Ohio and their needs. The committee was charged with finding ways for OAC to become more accessible to people with disabilities. The committee consists primarily of artists with disabilities.

The committee has been very instrumental in providing assistance in developing OAC's accessibility and compliance plan. The committee itself has grown in many ways since their formation and have accomplished the following:

- ❖ They are in the process of becoming a 501(c) 3. They are called: *The Artists with Disabilities Network Ohio* (here after referred to as Network).
- ❖ The Network meets with the OAC staff quarterly and meets monthly as a group. The OAC provides accommodations for all of their meetings and reimburses travel to those from other cities.
- ❖ OAC has assigned a consultant, with organizational development background, to work with the Network to assist them in establishing a 501 (c) 3 service organization. They have developed their mission and by-laws and goal and objectives.
- ❖ An annual two-day retreat with the Network and OAC staff is held to plan and set the agenda for the coming year.
- ❖ The Network received training along with OAC staff from the Cultural Access Institute in preparation of the "Road shows". This training also prepared them to be added to our consultant pool, thus creating employment opportunities for artists with disabilities.
- ❖ A budget has been set-aside annually for the Network since 1990.