



AXIS OF ACCESS

Listen to Dis Community and Art
Saskatchewan Arts Alliance

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How to Use This Document

The Axis of Access is designed to be a practical and evolving resource.

This document introduces disability culture and outlines the principles behind the Axis of Access initiative. It also includes calls to action for organizations and individuals working in Saskatchewan's arts sector. Each section can be read on its own or as part of the whole, and we encourage you to move through the document at your own pace.



Introduction to Disability Culture

Disability culture is built from the unique lived experiences, values, and perspectives of people with disabilities. It celebrates diversity and challenges societal norms around disability, promoting accessibility and equity. Disability culture highlights the creativity, resilience, and contributions of disabled individuals while advocating for rights and recognition. Disability culture is a process not a statement.

Most disabilities are not visible. The treatment and perception of disabled people have varied significantly across cultures and time. Historically, disability has been deeply misunderstood—often associated with fear, pity, or shame. This led to neglect, abuse, institutionalization, and systemic exclusion. Many disabled people were denied autonomy, forced into institutions, or subjected to harmful policies such as eugenics and forced sterilization. The legacy of these practices continues to influence how access and inclusion are understood today.



For over a decade, Listen to Dis' has been dedicated to raising awareness and promoting an understanding of access in the art and culture sectors. Along the way, LTD' has faced innumerable challenges for using their voice and lived experience: from being overlooked and questioned to not being heard or even silenced. LTD' has remained steadfast in using their voice and continues to advocate for equitable access and understanding of disability culture in the provincial arts sector.

An inspiration for this project was [We See You White American Theatre's Principles for Building Anti-Racist Theatre Systems](#). From this, LTD' and SAA, have created a similar text about actionable principles for building accessibility within the arts community in Saskatchewan. This document will serve as a baseline entry point for arts organizations and artists to start learning about and implementing access practices.

We understand that the Axis of Access will never be “done” and that it is a fluid document that we will continue to work with and update on an ongoing basis. The intersectionality of access is at the heart of this work. The work of creating access is for everyone.



Access is foundational. Access is situational. Access is action.

We call upon all arts and cultural organizations to come together in this collective understanding of access as it applies to disabled artists, patrons, and community in Saskatchewan. We aim to build access in the arts and cultural sector. We will do this by creating a unified provincial initiative.

We expect that upon reviewing this document and the calls to action outlined below, you will recognize your personal and institutional responsibility to provide and facilitate access in all aspects of the arts and cultural sector and commit to ongoing education surrounding access needs.

We expect all responses and actions to be conducted safely and respectfully. We will not (or no longer) tolerate uninformed judgment, abuse, or harassment of any kind.

We see a world that belongs to all, and we must understand that without access, there is no equity or justice.

¹ This section is almost entirely drawn directly from 'We See you White American Theatre,' which was the direct inspiration for the Axis of Access Initiative.



You are responsible for acknowledging that ‘access’ is not a single concept. Access is foundational and situational: accessibility means different things for different people.

Calls to action:

- Provide foundational access as legislated by the [Accessible Saskatchewan Act](#) and the [Accessible Canada Act](#).
- Learn about situational access and integrate your understanding into all areas of operations, programming, and planning.
- Understand that different types of accommodations meet different needs. You are responsible for accommodating various needs without causing shame for disabled people.
- Create and share an actionable access statement and plan for your organization.
- Clearly communicate what access needs and accommodations you can and cannot provide. There is no shame in not having the resources to provide adequate access.



You are responsible for understanding that barriers to access exist. The existing support structures for disabled people are currently inadequate.

Calls to action:

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- Living with disability is very expensive and 16.5% of disabled people live in poverty. Nearly one third of Saskatchewan residents, 30%, are disabled.
- Understand that costs incurred to meet visible, invisible, or unrecognized needs are exorbitant.
- Cost barriers have historically prevented disabled people from participating in the arts and cultural sector.
- Inadequate financial support creates a barrier to access in the arts.
- The lack of access that currently exists in Saskatchewan is evident in all aspects of the art sector.

² As of 2021, 16.5% of people with disabilities live in poverty in Canada, accounting for more than 1.5 million people. This is a sharp contrast to the 8.6% of people without disabilities who live in poverty. (cf. Disability Poverty in Canada: a 2023 report card.

³ Disability without Poverty: 2024 Disability Poverty Report Card, pg 22. https://www.disabilitywithoutpoverty.ca/sites/default/files/2024-12/FINAL-Disability-Poverty-Report-Card-English_compressed.pdf



- There are many barriers to participation for disabled people. These barriers include, but are not limited to, physical, financial, sensory, and attitudinal barriers.
- Providing accessible spaces and washrooms is the minimum standard, not the end goal.

You are responsible to commit to accessibility training at all levels of your organization.

- Ensure that all staff, Board, and volunteers receive ongoing access training. Offering equitable education about disability culture contributes to providing access to disabled artists and patrons.
- Commit to providing development and training for disabled artists, including, but not limited to, performing artists, visual artists, arts administrators, curatorial and production staff, etc.
- Understand that grant writing and reporting is inaccessible for many (disabled) people. Complicated and varied portals, unclear language and repetition, ableist funding policies and consultants, and deadlines are four familiar barriers.



- Providing access is not limited to the audience.
- Provide accessible work environments and artistic processes for amateur, emerging, and professional artists that are flexible, responsive, and inclusive. This can include: soft/flexible scheduling, remote participation options, modifying timelines or rehearsal durations, accessible creative spaces, paid access labour and support for access workers, and prioritizing rest and recovery.
- Provide safe and adequate transportation options or ensure accessible public transit is available.
- Offer flexible attendance options, including refunds for those unable to attend.
- Conflicts around access are functions of attitude, making it important to have open and collaborative approaches to communication by both those providing access and disabled people.



You are responsible to recognize the agency and autonomy of disabled people.

- You are not the expert on someone else's needs, regardless of your personal or professional experience.
- Believe and support disabled people when they tell you their needs.
- Work with people to make events and spaces accessible without dismissing or undermining the input of disabled people - patrons, participants, and art professionals.
- Follow best practices and advice from those with lived experience and disability scholars.
- Clearly state if you cannot provide access and what known barriers exist.
- Create safe spaces where disabled people can be themselves without shame.



You are responsible for recognizing the challenges faced by people with new or changing access needs.

Calls to action:

- The social model of disability, widely used in Canada, says that people are disabled by society's barriers, not by impairments or differences.
- Understand that disabled people are more often inconvenienced by barriers to access than by the symptoms of disability themselves.
- A disabled person may be dealing with a new diagnosis, unfamiliar symptoms, or a situation for which they are not yet equipped to advocate.
- Clearly state your policies, procedures, or requirements. Unclear or unstated expectations can disadvantage those with access needs.



Moving Forward

Access is ongoing work that requires commitment, openness, and respect. By taking these actions, you help create a world where disabled people are included, valued, and able to participate fully in the arts and cultural life of Saskatchewan. Together, we can build a more accessible, just, and equitable arts community.



Top 10 Low Resource Access Actions

1. **Communicate Clearly** — Let people know what access you can provide and what you cannot. Transparency builds trust.
2. **Offer Flexible Scheduling** — Allow varied times or remote participation to fit different needs.
3. **Provide Remote Participation** — Use phone or video options when possible.
4. **Create Safe Spaces** — Foster respectful, welcoming environments for disabled people.
5. **Use Plain Language** — Make all communications easy to understand.
6. **Train Staff Regularly** — Basic access awareness for all employees and volunteers.
7. **Offer ASL Interpretation or Captioning** — Accommodating access needs builds equity.
8. **Be Open to Feedback** — Actively listen and adapt your practices.
9. **Provide Accessible Seating Options** — Even simple seating accommodations help.
10. **Allow Refunds or Flexible Attendance** — Enable people to attend without fear of loss if they need to cancel.



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