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# **MetLife Foundation**

#### EXPANDING ACCESS TO THE ARTS

Funding for this project was made possible through the MetLife Foundation

Made possible through funding from the MetLife Foundation, Arts Presenters developed this interactive feature to provide indepth information and useful tips on accessibility and inclusion in the arts. Arts Presenters' goal is to increase knowledge and encourage participation by profiling the work of exemplary awardees and highlighted leaders in the field of presenting who consistently demonstrate dynamic accessibility initiatives.

## **Expanding Access to the Arts**

Since 2005, Arts Presenters has recognized eleven performing arts organizations that have demonstrated innovation, leadership and a commitment to accessibility in the arts. The awards program provides an opportunity to identify strategies, tools, and resources that performing arts presenters have developed to increase access to the arts for people in underserved communities, whether they are rural, inner-city, communities in transition or new communities. It broadens the scope of access initiatives to differentiate how organizations effectively respond to the changing demographics of this country and engage underserved populations in all aspects of programming.

In addition, the awards program has identified organizations that created programs or practices in response to new technologies, recent demographic changes to communities and/or an on-going dialogue to engage community members in planning for and providing access to the arts for everyone.

It is our hope that this resource will encourage all presenters to embrace these values and translate them into action by:

- highlighting the importance of an organization-wide commitment to accessibility;
- describing effective practices in community engagement, implementation and evaluation; and
- sharing advice from the experts.

Arts Presenters invites our colleagues in the presenting field to explore and learn from the information contained in the profiles and in this feature, and get involved in the movement to make arts accessible to all.

### **Organizational Profiles**

American Musical Theatre of San Jose
Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities
Arvada, Colorado
Citi Performing Arts Center
Boston, MA
Flynn Center for the Performing Arts
Burlington, VT
The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
The Kentucky Center
Louisville, KY
Mixed Blood Theatre Company
Minneapolis, MN

Museum of Contemporary ArtChicago, ILPaper Mill PlayhouseMillburn, NJVictory Gardens TheatreChicago, ILWheelock Family TheatreBoston, MA

## **Background**

Accessibility is often thought of in conjunction with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), signed into law by George W. Bush in 1990, to ensure an equal opportunity for persons with disabilities. According to a 2006 report from the U.S. Census Bureau, 6.5 percent of the non-institutionalized civilian population ages 5-20 have a disability; 13 percent of those between the ages of 21-64 have a disability; and 41 percent of people age 65 and over have a disability.

However, after more than 18 years, accessibility is no longer a new concept. It should not be a surprise that people with disabilities want to attend performances, appear on stage, create dance and music, write plays or otherwise be engaged in the performing arts. Just as art evolves over time and in response to our world, so does accessibility. According to Betty Siegel, Director of Accessibility at the Kennedy Center,

Accessibility efforts are never finished. New technologies introduce new opportunities for creating more accessible environments and programs. Changes in community and changes in perspectives within the disability community make it impossible to ever say that one is done. Accessibility isn't static.

In interviews conducted by the Roan Group, Inc., in 2006, as part of Arts Presenters' Strategic Review, representatives of the presenting and performing arts fields identified values that are important to growing future audiences for the performing arts. These include diversity and inclusiveness. Recent research by Brown and Novak (2008) identifies audience engagement as critical to making the arts accessible for all:

One might even go so far as to suggest that the results indicate a shift in the traditional role of arts presenters from one of simply marketing and presenting to one of drawing audiences into the experience (i.e., an engagement approach) through a combination of education, outreach, marketing and interactions with artists.2

As we reflect on who we are and who we want to be as presenters in the 21st century, what seems clear is that presenting arts organizations can only become vital community assets, value diversity and inclusiveness and increase audiences if we are committed to engaging all people, including those with disabilities, and those who have experienced other barriers or challenges to engaging in the unique experience of live performance.

#### **How to Demonstrate Accessibility in Your Community**

The following sections provide an overview of best practices used by the organizations listed above to create accessibility in the arts. We have highlighted effective strategies; identified challenges encountered and overcome; and, shared the accomplishments of each. Performing arts organizations that are committed to access and inclusion share the following effective practices:

Performing arts organizations have an organization-wide commitment to

1. Commitment and Strategic Planning	access and inclusion, and proactively, routinely and consistently engage people with disabilities and organizations that serve this segment of the community in planning.
2. Community Engagement	Performing arts organizations proactively, routinely and consistently engage the community in planning, programming and advocacy for access beyond the walls of the facility.
3. Programming and Services	Performing arts organizations engage staff, artists and audience members with disabilities by routinely providing professional development and a wide range of physical and programmatic accessibility services.
4. Evaluation	Performing arts organizations continuously assess their physical and programmatic accessibility.

Arts Presenters would like to acknowledge Johanna Misey Boyer, JMB Arts Management, for her assistance with the development of this report.

1 The Roan Group, Inc., "Executive Summary-Strategic Review: Final Engagement Report" (Washington, DC: Association of Performing Arts Presenters, April 2007), 3.

2 Alan S. Brown and Jennifer L. Novak, "Assessing the Intrinsic Impacts of a Live Performance" (Fairfax, VA, Cambridge, MA and San Francisco, CA: WolfBrown, January 2008) 21.

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# American Musical Theatre Of San Jose (AMTSJ) San Jose, CA

Main Website: http://www.amtsj.org

Accessibility Web Page: http://amtsj.org/ed\_out/accessibility.html

#### **Point of Contact**

D.J. Zwicker-Sobrepena

Director of Education and Outreach

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Phone: 408-453-1533 TTY: 408-453-7154

#### Overview

The mission of American Musical Theatre of San Jose (AMTSJ) is to create the highest quality of musical theatre that inspires the spirit of our diverse community. Founded as the San Jose Light Opera Association in 1934, AMTSJ is one of the oldest musical theatre companies in America. Annual attendance is approximately 150,000, which includes 15,000 subscribers. The theatre has an annual budget of \$9.8 million.

AMTSJ produces four shows each season and presents several touring productions. Its home is the San Jose Center for the Performing Arts, which has a capacity of 2,665. In addition, AMTSJ serves over 13,000 children and families.

#### Strategic Planning

AMTSJ developed a concise accessibility policy and posted it for the public on their website. The policy statement includes information on ticketing procedures and the theatre's timeline for releasing seats for people with disabilities to the general public. The policy can be found at <a href="here">here</a>.

#### **Professional Development**

AMTSJ's executive staff maintains up-to-date information on accessibility laws to remain aware of how the laws effect their respective departments. For example, the chief financial officer relies on her knowledge of the law while negotiating accessibility issues and costs for touring productions. In addition, AMTSJ's education director offers group and one-to-one trainings for AMTSJ staff.

#### **Community Engagement**

AMTSJ collaborates with organizations such as the <u>California School for the Deaf</u>, the <u>Deaf Counseling</u>, <u>Advocacy and Referral Agency</u> and Santa Clara County Commission for Persons with Disabilities to build audiences for performances and educational matinees.

### **Programs and Services**

The San Jose Center for the Performing Arts is accessible to audience members and artists. Services include:

- Audio study guides in a CD-ROM format
- Audio-described or ASL-interpreted backstage tours
- Audio-described tactile tours
- Open captioning using PDAs
- Complimentary tickets to the final dress rehearsal of each produced show distributed through services agencies

#### **Evaluation**

The San Jose Center for the Performing Arts measures the success of their accessibility program by:

- asking the subscribers who request access services to participate in focus groups and surveys to assess the theatre's services; and
- soliciting informal feedback from audience members, community leaders and service providers such as ASL interpreters and audio describers.

### **Tips for Success**

- Make sure that your unions are committed to accessibility.
- Spend time getting to know the disability community.
- Learn how to use the equipment, so that you can train others.
- Learn as much as you can about the laws pertaining to people with disabilities, like the Americans with Disabilities Act and state laws, and any likely legislative changes. This will position you and your facility to be "ahead of the curve."

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# **Arvada Center For The Arts And Humanities Arvada, CO**

Main Website: http://www.arvadacenter.org

Accessibility Web Page: http://www.arvadacenter.org/the-center/accessibility

#### **Point of Contact**

Mickey McVey Education Director

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#### Overview

The mission of the Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities is, "We Open Worlds to You." The facility opened in 1976, and was renovated and expanded in 2006. Yearly attendance is approximately 320,000, including over 6,000 subscribers. The budget in 2007 was \$10.3 million. Education programs serve over 65,000 adults and children in more than 800 classes a year.

The Arvada Center offers theater, concerts and dance performances in two theatres seating 500 and 224, and one amphitheater seating 800 covered and 600 lawn; art galleries; a historical museum; and classes in ceramics, dance, writing and visual arts.

The Arvada Center has been nationally recognized for their accessibility program. In 1991, VSA arts recognized the center's accessibility program with the VSA arts/MetLife Cultural Access award. In 2005, their education director received the award for excellence in accessibility leadership from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the Christopher Reeve Foundation. With the leadership of a performing arts sign language interpreter who graduated from Gallaudet University, the Arvada Center shadow-interpreted it's first performance in 1981 and started its deaf access program in 1983.

### Strategic Planning

The Arvada Center's commitment to accessibility starts with its mission and flows through its core objectives—being a leader in diverse and accessible programming, and serving as a regional and national model for excellence in the arts. The goal of their accessibility program is to ensure that all adults and children with disabilities have the opportunity to experience the arts by eliminating physical and programmatic barriers.

## **Professional Development**

At any given time, approximately 75 to 80 percent of the staff is trained in accessibility. The Arvada Center provides its staff with periodic, in-depth sessions conducted by <u>VSA arts of Colorado</u>; training videos, group and one-to-one trainings conducted by the education director; and diversity trainings and manuals that include accessibility topics for their staff.

## **Community Engagement**

Partners and focus groups serve as community liaisons to enhance communication in the community, market directly to people with disabilities and to connect with community leaders. The center's primary partners include:

- *VSA arts of Colorado* which provides professional development for center staff. The Arvada Center provides exhibition space in its emerging artists' gallery for VSA arts Colorado artists.
- Students from the interpretation program at Front Range Community College attend shadow-interpreted performances.

In addition, Arvada shares its expertise in accessibility, particularly shadow interpretation, with other arts organizations in the greater Denver area and across the country. Specifically:

- the education director is a resource to her peers through the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District in the greater metropolitan Denver region and nationally;
- the center developed and copyrighted a shadow training manual and CD that is available to groups, both locally and nationally; and
- the center shares its group of trained, shadow interpreters with other performing arts facilities in the community.

### **Programs and Services**

The center is accessible to everyone with a disability. The center offers the following services:

- An American Sign Language interpreter "on call" in the center for three hours a day
- Shadow interpretation
- Touch tours of permanent museum exhibits
- Arts Day workshops designed for students who are blind or deaf
- A ramp between the stage and audience.
- *Squiggles* a play environment that is wheelchair accessible and has a variety of textures that provide a tactile experience for people who are blind or have low vision
- A website that is 100 percent ADA compliant to Conformance Level AAA
- Theater performance materials that indicate ASL-interpreted performances and audio-described performances
- Information on programmatic accessibility embedded in marketing and outreach materials for the theater, gallery and education programs
- Separate press releases for accessibility performances for mainstream media contacts and targeted disability contacts

#### **Evaluation**

The Arvada Center measures the success of their accessibility program through the following methods:

- Focus groups comprised of members of the deaf and blind community that discuss existing practices as well as visions for the future
- Feedback and evaluation forms where teachers, students and audience members, specifically those that use large print programs or assistive listening devices, share reactions and offer suggestions

### **Tips for Success**

- Convene a separate focus group with representatives from the deaf community. Other focus groups can include representatives of different disability communities.
- Provide food for your focus group.
- Engage your focus group or access committee in making art; for example, center staff asked a focus group to create a photo journal, the last page of which is information on the accessibility program.
- Be consistent in making people with disabilities feel welcome as audience members. If you are inconsistent in any one
  year because of staff changes, lack of enthusiasm from leaders or other priorities such as facility expansion, you will
  have to begin again.
- Find a mentor. He or she doesn't have to be from a similarly-sized organization.
- Move forward with new programs or services when the environment is supportive and the staff is ready. File ideas away until the time is right. It took the center seven years, for example, to complete Squiggles.
- Be honest about your limitations and ask for help from the community that you are trying to serve.
- Identify one or two staff members who are passionate about accessibility and they can be the conscience of your organization.

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# Citi Performing Arts Center Boston, MA

Main Website: http://www.citicenter.org

**Accessibility Web Pages:** 

Wang Theatre: <a href="http://www.citicenter.org/theatres/wang/accessibility-wang.php">http://www.citicenter.org/theatres/wang/accessibility-wang.php</a>
Shubert Theatre: <a href="http://www.citicenter.org/theatres/shubert/accessibility-shubert.php">http://www.citicenter.org/theatres/shubert/accessibility-shubert.php</a>

#### **Point of Contact**

Ruth Mercado Director of Education

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Phone: 617-532-1256 TTY: 888-889-8527

#### **Overview**

The Citi Performing Arts Center is known nationally as a true community arts center whose doors are open to all. With the belief that arts make and keep us a civilized nation, the Citi Performing Arts Center proudly looks forward to a bright future with the mission of presenting the finest performing artists and cultural attractions from around the world.

Citi Center is the guardian of the Wang Theatre and the Shubert Theatre, both historic theatres (developed in the early 1900s) restored in the 1990s. The organization's budget is approximately \$8.7 million, and annual attendance is over one million.

The Wang, which seats 3,600, presents Broadway, theater, music, dance, opera and film. The Shubert, which seats 1,500, is the home for many local community organizations and serves as a venue for the touring companies that present Broadway, theater, music, dance and opera. In the summer, Citi Center presents free Shakespeare productions on Boston Common through the <a href="Commonwealth Shakespeare Company">Commonwealth Shakespeare Company</a> and a one-day, companion festival. *Celebrate Shakespeare Day*, which is a multi-

faceted free event featuring workshops, performances, backstage tours and lectures for the public to enjoy and learn more about the works of William Shakespeare.

Several national and state organizations have recognized the center's community leadership with awards. The center received the 2003 MetLife Foundation/VSA arts Access Innovation in the Arts Award and the Bay State Council of the Blind Outstanding Access Award in 2005.

### **Strategic Planning**

In addition to a mission statement that emphasizes the center's role as a community center open to everyone, Citi Center has a statement on accessibility:

Citi Performing Arts Center places the highest priority on the comfort and safety of its patrons. To this end, the Citi Performing Arts Center recognizes the needs of persons with disabilities, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and subsequent modifications.

Citi Performing Arts Center makes every effort to accommodate patrons with disabilities and communication disorders in compliance with both ADA and Commonwealth guidelines.

The guiding philosophy of the education department also demonstrates the center's commitment to serving all community members:

Our education department was founded on the belief that the arts are an essential part of daily life. Its mission is to motivate young people, inspire teachers, and bring communities together through innovative programs in the literary, visual and performing arts. In an environment that fosters direct participation and self-expression, we encourage people to approach problems creatively and to better understand themselves and each other. We also strive to make the arts accessible to those who may not have previously been exposed to interactive and creative arts programs.

### **Professional Development**

Citi Center collaborates with the <u>Cultural Access Consortium</u> to provide accessibility training to all staff and trustees. The curriculum focuses on ticketing and seating policies, and emergency procedures.

### **Community Engagement**

Citi Center solicits input from the community through its board of directors, committees and partners. The Citi Center's board includes people with disabilities. There is also a board committee focused on diversity and access.

Programs are planned with partners in the community, for example, the education department collaborated with the <a href="Horace">Horace</a> <a href="Mann School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing">Mann School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing</a> to create a community workshop on contemporary Shakespeare that culminated in an original work performed by students during Celebrate Shakespeare Day. In addition to several planning meetings involving Citi Center and school staff, and the teaching artist, this group also met weekly during the program for a formative evaluation. The teaching artist, who is deaf, promoted the theatre piece and the American Sign Language (ASL) interpreted day within the deaf community through blogs. Citi Center partnered with the <a href="Cultural Access Consortium">Cultural Access Consortium</a> to identify ASL interpreters for this event.

### **Programs and Services**

To serve the deaf community, Citi Center inaugurated in 2006 an accessible Celebrate Shakespeare Day with 23 ASL

interpreters available to translate all tours, workshops, discussions and performances. This event included a short performance by Horace Mann School students of an original work that connected *The Taming of the Shrew* with teen dating violence and issues in the deaf community.

The Wang and Shubert theatres are accessible to audience members.

#### **Evaluation**

The education department conducts individual evaluations with partnership program participants and the education team. The department focuses on outcomes, and uses a logic model with indicators developed with input from the community.

### **Tips for Success**

- Be sensitive to the community's needs.
- Understand that relationships with community members and organizations grow slowly.

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# Flynn Center For The Performing Arts Burlington, VT

Main Website: http://www.flynncenter.org

Accessibility Web Page: http://www.flynncenter.org/about/access.shtml

#### **Point of Contact**

Arnie Malina

Chief Programming Officer and Artistic Director

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Phone: 802-652-4503 TTY: 800-253-0191

#### Overview

The mission of the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts is to foster the enjoyment, understanding, and development of the performing arts in Vermont and the region. The Flynn fulfills its mission through the following goals:

- Develop, maintain and manage the historic Flynn Theatre and Flynn Center properties to meet current and evolving performing arts needs in the region.
- Present a diverse range of high quality performances by established and emerging artists that expand and enrich the community's cultural experiences.
- Provide educational programs that engage children, teens and adults in the artistic process; cultivate appreciation of the performing arts; and make the performing arts an integral part of school and community life.
- Support local, national and international artists in the development and presentation of their work.

The Flynn Theatre first opened as a vaudeville and movie house in 1930. In 2000, the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts reopened as a comprehensive performing arts center. The Flynn includes the restored, Art Deco theatre that seats 1,453, and

Flynn Space—home to the <u>Vermont Stage Company</u> that seats 110 to 200. The Flynn also has education and dance studios, and a visual arts gallery. Annual attendance is more than 150,000 with an additional 45,000 young people attending more than 30 student matinee performances. The annual budget is approximately \$4.2 million.

### **Strategic Planning**

The Flynn's websites states, "The Flynn Center for the Performing Arts is committed to making our facility and programs accessible to all in our community." Since 1996, the Flynn has had an *Access Transition Plan* named with the belief that one is never "done" with accessibility; one is always in "transition."

The current iteration of the Flynn's *Access Transition Plan* focuses on:

- increasing public awareness of available access accommodations;
- increasing Flynn staff and board awareness of available access accommodations;
- maintaining active liaison with disability community organizations and individuals to update trainings, services and outreach opportunities; developing more inclusive, universally designed marketing materials;
- increasing programming and educational collaborations with disability community organizations and individuals; and
- increasing performance/residency opportunities for artists with disabilities and inclusive performance troupes.

### **Professional Development**

Flynn staff members have participated in Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and disability awareness workshops. Staff members from relevant departments have also formed an access task force. Taskforce members participate in ongoing training, respond to accessibility services requests and questions, and provide oversight of the Flynn's *Access Transition Plan*.

In addition, the <u>AXIS Dance Company</u> conducted "sensitivity" training sessions for Flynn staff, board members and community partners. The company also led a panel discussion and workshop for the association of businesses in downtown Burlington, VT.

#### **Community Engagement**

The Flynn's commitment to engaging the community about arts access began in earnest in 1996 with its first Access Transition Plan. In collaboration with the <u>Vermont Arts Council</u>, the <u>Vermont Center for Independent Living</u>, VSA arts Vermont and other Vermont cultural institutions, the Flynn participated in a series of site visits from ADA specialists and members of the disability community. These site visits identified specific physical access modifications and incorporated those findings into major renovations when the Flynn expanded its site in 2000.

In 1997, the Flynn hosted statewide arts access training in collaboration with the <u>Vermont State Department of Vocational Rehabilitation</u>, <u>Vermont Arts Council</u>, the Vermont Center for Independent Living and the <u>New England ADA Technical Assistance Center</u>. In successive site visits in 2000 and 2003, the Flynn identified a series of effective communication and accessible programming initiatives.

As part of the Flynn's revision of its Access Transition Plan following the <u>AXIS Dance Company</u> initiative, staff consulted with community organizations that serve people with disabilities and directly with people with disabilities. Their discussions included how people with disabilities could be part of the Flynn's education and artistic programs. Flynn staff followed a similar process when they decided to be more intentional about providing American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation and audio description. They consulted with special education teachers and organized focus group discussions with community members on how they found out about productions; what they were interested in; and what the Flynn needed to provide.

In addition, starting in 2001, the Flynn began a multi-year collaboration with the Awareness Theater Company, a local theater

company made up of adults with developmental disabilities performing original works, as well as a multi-year collaboration with VSA arts Vermont to bring artists with disabilities to the Flynn stage. The executive director of VSA arts Vermont serves on the Flynn's programming committee. For the 2007/2008 season, the Flynn worked with the Vermont Council of the Blind to double the number of audio-described events.

### **Programs and Services**

The Flynn offers the following programs:

- A six-and-a-half week six site New England tour for <u>AXIS Dance Company</u> of Oakland, CA, fostering intensive
  residencies in each community; overseeing access initiatives across the tour; and convening meetings and discussions
  between regional presenters, the artists, and representatives from the disability community to plan the tour and respective
  residencies, discuss best practices, and share resources. This tour was a first of its kind for both the region and the artists.
- a day of integrated dance with AXIS Dance Company, featuring a video/lecture/discussion with company members;
- a "Fundamentals of Physically Integrated Dance" class for movers of all abilities and experience
- A master class for dance teachers, choreographers and professional-level dancers to learn about ways to be more inclusive in their own teaching and choreography
- Day-long residencies in area schools
- Student and teacher training workshops
- University of Vermont campus workshops in conjunction with "Deaf and Disability Awareness Month."
- Workshops by AXIS for recreational, occupational and physical therapists to learn new movement-based exercises and philosophies to share with clients.

The Flynn is committed to presenting disability issues on stage by companies that feature artists with disabilities. In May 2008, the Flynn presented <u>Back to Back Theatre</u> an Australian ensemble of six actors considered to have intellectual disabilities. They performed Small Metal Objects in the downtown pedestrian mall.

The Flynn offers the following services to artists:

- dressing rooms with a roll-in shower; and
- lift assistance for stage access.

The Flynn offers the following services to its audience members:

- personal curbside assistance on request for main stage events;
- the names of the scheduled ASL-interpreters and audio describers are provided in marketing materials;
- automated doors at emergency exits and side doors;
- an accessible community ticket program that provides free tickets to disability service and disability community organizations; and
- brochures that outline all accessibility services. Marketing materials are universally designed and available in multiple formats.

#### **Evaluation**

The Flynn solicits written evaluations from each education program participant. Staff also sends evaluation forms to organizations that participate in the discount ticket program. For the AXIS Dance Company tour, assessment methods included digital photography, video and written evaluations designed to capture qualitative and quantitative data.

### **Tips for Success**

- Build partnerships with organizations that serve the disability community and build direct relationships with people with disabilities.
- Find out the schedule for other events such as conferences that might be of interest to the disability community and schedule your ASL interpreted or audio-described performances or other events targeted to the disability community —accordingly.
- Don't overlook the importance of family shows" to people with disabilities.
- Connect deeply and consistently with community members.

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# John F. Kennedy Center For The Performing Arts Washington, DC

Main Website: <a href="http://www.kennedy-center.org">http://www.kennedy-center.org</a>

Accessibility Web Page: http://www.kennedy-center.org/accessibility

#### **Point of Contact**

Betty R. Siegel

Director of Accessibility

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#### Overview

Since opening in 1971, the Kennedy Center continues to present the greatest performers and performances from across America and around the world, nurturing new works and young artists and serving the nation as a leader in arts education.

The Kennedy Center is America's living memorial to President Kennedy as well as the nation's busiest arts facility, presenting more than 2,000 performances each year to two million audience members. More than 7 million people nationwide take part annually in innovative and effective education programs initiated by the center including performances, lecture/demonstrations, open rehearsals, dance and music residencies, master classes, competitions for young actors and musicians, backstage tours and workshops for teachers.

With an annual budget of approximately \$128 million, the center includes the Concert Hall which seats 2,442; the Opera House which seats 2,350; the Eisenhower Theater which seats 1,100; the Terrace Theater which seats 513; the Theater Lab which seats 399 and the Family Theater and the KC Jazz Club.

### Strategic Planning

The Kennedy Center has demonstrated a commitment to all people through its strategies, accessibility policy, institutional culture and goals.

The goal of its arts access program is to be reflective of the diversity in the community and inclusive of all people with disabilities including audience members, employees, interns, volunteers, performers and artistic staff using the following strategies:

- policies, procedures and practices that address equal access for people with disabilities
- active participation, from people with disabilities, in the decision making processes and implementation of arts access programs
- being responsive to the needs, changing technologies and attitudes of the disability community

## **Professional Development**

The director of accessibility trains staff and interns at the Kennedy Center. The focus is primarily on front-of-house staff. However, other staff members are invited to attend these trainings and the annual <u>Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability</u> (LEAD) conference when it is held at the center.

#### **Community Engagement**

The Kennedy Center relies primarily on ad hoc focus groups composed of members of the disability community, disability organizations and audience members with disabilities to provide community input; for example, when the center renovated the Eisenhower Theater, the director of accessibility consulted with an architect and audience members who have disabilities. For the Concert Hall renovation, consultations were done with universal design experts. The director of accessibility also has a "circle of advisors" that is available by phone or e-mail as needed. In addition, organizations, audience members and visitors share their suggestions and criticisms informally with staff.

The center also engages the disability community through collaborations with the <u>Christopher Reeve Foundation</u>, the <u>National Spinal Cord Injury Association</u> and the <u>National Council on Independent Living</u> among others. The staff in the accessibility office work closely with staff from the <u>Smithsonian Institution</u>. In 1998, the center partnered with the <u>National Endowment for the Arts</u> and several other federal agencies to plan and execute the first National Forum on <u>Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities</u>.

## **Programs and Services**

Beginning with the creation of the *Specially Priced Ticket* program in 1971 and the *Committee for Handicapped Children* (now VSA arts) later in the decade, the Kennedy Center has always provided services to people with disabilities. The Kennedy Center offers the following programs and services:

- Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability (LEAD) network
- Opening Stages newsletter for people with disabilities pursuing careers in the arts
- Experiential Education Initiative (EEI) internship for people with developmental disabilities
- Founding members of <u>Audio Description International</u>
- Hosting the national forums on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities in 1998 and 2009
- Assistive Listening Devices for People with Hearing Loss: A Guide for Performing Arts Settings
- Tip sheets on a variety of ADA topics for 504 coordinators, accessibility managers or other cultural arts professionals interested in making their facilities and programming more accessible to people with disabilities

- American Sign Language interpretation, cued-speech transliteration or oral interpretations
- Open captioning
- Courtesy wheelchairs available while at the center
- Kennedy Center doormen assist audience members with disabilities from the front of the building to the theaters
- Wheelchair accessible tours
- American Sign Language-interpreted and touch tours
- Specially priced tickets (SPT) for up to two tickets per person at half price
- Accessible backstage areas for the artists in all theaters
- Cross aisles to enhance wheelchair access in the Concert Hall
- A ramp between the stage and the audience in the Family Theater to facilitate access when artists need volunteers from the audience

#### **Evaluation**

The Kennedy Center evaluates its accessibility services through assessing the number of complaints, amount of ticket sales and number of subscribers to its e-mail alerts and newsletter.

## **Tips for Success**

- Be persistent, patient and passionate.
- Try to instill the importance of access and inclusion in students attending arts administration programs.

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# The Kentucky Center For The Performing Arts Louisville, KY

Main Website: <a href="http://www.kentuckycenter.org">http://www.kentuckycenter.org</a>

Accessibility Web Page: http://www.kentuckycenter.org/aboutus/accessibility.asp

#### **Point of Contact**

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Director of Access Services

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#### Overview

The mission of the Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts is to provide artistically diverse performances of the highest quality. The center serves Kentucky through education and initiatives that expand and diversify audiences while enhancing their understanding, appreciation and support for the arts. The center strives to challenge, stimulate and entertain while operating in a fiscally responsible manner and acting as an economic and cultural catalyst for the commonwealth.

Opened in 1983, the center is home to Stage One Children's Theatre, the Louisville Orchestra, PNC Bank Broadway Across America, the Louisville Ballet and Kentucky Opera. The center also offers artistic presentations that complement and enhance the work of these performance companies. The annual budget is approximately \$7.5 million, and annual attendance is approximately 440,000. The center includes the Robert S. Whitney Hall, which is a 2,406-seat, multipurpose, concert facility; the Moritz von Bomhard Theater seats 619 and the MeX Theater (Boyd Martin Experimental Theater), a "black box" has a maximum seating capacity of 139. The center also manages the nearby Brown Theatre, a restored 1925 theater seating 1,400.

The Kentucky Center has been recognized nationally for their work in accessibility. In 2004, the center received the VSA arts

MetLife Foundation Award of Excellence in Arts Access and the 2007 Excellence in Accessibility Leadership Award from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

## **Strategic Planning**

The center's commitment to accessibility is tied to two of the core values of the Kentucky Center: "We believe all people have the ability to express themselves through the arts." and, "All people should have access to quality art experiences." The education department is dedicated to enriching the lives of all people in the community, region and commonwealth through the arts. Staff "believe that the human capacity for art is universal and that we have been called upon both to present art and to build bridges of understanding and access to the arts."

### **Professional Development**

The director of access services annually conducts training for new staff and volunteers, and provides an annual refresher workshop for everyone. The basic training includes an overview of:

- the Americans with Disabilities Act;
- basic tips for interacting with people with disabilities such as appropriate language;
- how to provide captioning and audio description to patrons that come to the center;
- the center's access services, and how to receive them; and
- the center's access policies.

In addition, five departments—ticketing, custodial, maintenance, security and customer service—receive additional training specific to their respective departments. The custodial staff, for example, is responsible for removing seats in the theaters. While in training they learn why it is important to remove seats to remain accessible to people with disabilities that may be in wheelchairs.

## **Community Engagement**

The Kentucky Center has a variety of effective mechanisms for engaging the community including an access committee created to increase awareness of the center's services among members of the disability community and to keep the board of directors informed about the center's services. The committee is composed of members of the endowment board, the board of directors, people with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities, professionals representing organizations for people with disabilities and older adults. This committee is divided into three subcommittees: services, partnerships with the disability community and board communications.

Partnerships are another effective means of engaging the community. The Kentucky Center collaborates with the Kentucky Arts Council to provide access services to arts organizations throughout the commonwealth. Other partners are the American Printing House for the Blind, the Kentucky School for the Blind, the Kentucky Assistive Technology Service Network Coordinating Center and the local Self Help for Hard of Hearing chapter. In 1998, 2004 and 2008, the center worked with the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to host DeaFestival, a day of performances, visual art displays and activities all provided by people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

In addition, the center established the Arts Access Forum to develop partnerships between arts and cultural organizations, artists, and organizations that work with people of diverse abilities in the Louisville metro community. Representatives of the 34 member organizations meet monthly. Currently, the forum is awarding small grants to member organizations for projects or activities such as having a pre- and post-show discussion with a theater educator and providing ticket subsidies.

## **Programs and Services**

The center started audio describing productions in 1992. Today, the center's staff offer this service to other performing arts organizations in the commonwealth. In addition, their services include:

- an accessible Web site
- targeted marketing brochures that reach more than 700 individuals and organizations
- a self-guided, 30-minute, audio-described tour, *Images for the Ear*, of the center's 20th century art collection
- courtesy wheelchairs and volunteer greeters to assist audience members using wheelchairs to their seats or event location
- an Access KCard which provides an opportunity to purchase reduced tickets to selected performances
- captioning and audio description equipment and trained volunteers for other arts organizations in the commonwealth
- a directory of 800 organizations in Kentucky that serve people with disabilities
- training manuals for captioning and audio description
- workshops on the Americans with Disabilities Act legislation and arts accessibility for all regions of the commonwealth
- a monthly, electronic, Arts Access newsletter
- volunteers that run the captioning and audio description equipment
- volunteers that interact with audience members, soliciting feedback and responding to questions

#### **Evaluation**

In addition to feedback through the access committee, partnerships and individuals, access services staff ask audience members to complete evaluation forms. In 2002-2003, staff surveyed all audience members who utilized audio description, captioning, American Sign Language interpretation, alternate format materials and assistive listening devices.

The center asks for feedback and responds to suggestions. For example, when the center first started captioning, staff asked a 7th grade class at the Kentucky School of the Deaf to attend a performance. The students agreed that the best thing about the technology was that the captioning didn't leave out any words. The center is committed to including all words—even if the synchronization is not always perfect.

## **Tips for Success**

- Demonstrate for smaller arts organizations in the community that providing accessibility services does not have to be expensive and can be relatively easy to do.
- Conduct quality evaluation so that you can increase your services to people with disabilities.
- Learn to communicate your evaluation results strategically; for example, saying, "double the number of users we had two years ago" is more impressive than saying, "we have 400 users."
- Slow down; do what you can; and develop relationships in the community as you do your work.
- Work in partnership to provide better service to people with disabilities and to increase overall community awareness.

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# Paper Mill Playhouse Millburn, NJ

Main Website: <a href="http://www.papermill.org">http://www.papermill.org</a>

Accessibility Web Page: http://www.papermill.org/visit/accessibility.php

#### **Point of Contact**

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#### Overview

Paper Mill Playhouse preserves and nurtures the American musical theatre, and aspires to be a vital artistic and education center recognized throughout the region and the nation for its high-quality, innovative theatre and training programs. The theatre is committed to rediscovering and re-imagining classic musicals and plays, developing new musicals, training young and emerging artists, and ensuring that the theatre is accessible to all.

Founded in 1934, Paper Mill Playhouse raised the curtain on its first performance in 1938. After a fire in 1980, the playhouse reopened in 1982 with an art gallery and a 1,200 seat theatre. Its annual budget is approximately \$17 million, and yearly attendance is approximately 425,000.

As the first theatre in the country to schedule open-captioned performances, Paper Mill is a leader in access and inclusion. Paper Mill's leadership has been recognized by the <u>New Jersey Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing</u>, the <u>National Organization on Disability</u> and the <u>New Jersey State Council on the Arts</u>. Their access program received the <u>2003 VSA arts/MetLife Award</u> of Excellence in Arts Access, and Michael Mooney, the program's manager, received the <u>2003 Ann Klein Advocate Award for</u>

Service to Senior and Disability Communities.

## **Strategic Planning**

Paper Mill believes accessibility has to be part of your mission, outlook and purpose. Paper Mill explicitly states its commitment to access in its mission statement. In addition, the home page of its Web site includes the following sentence: "Paper Mill is one of the few theaters in the country that is fully accessible to individuals with disabilities."

## **Professional Development**

Paper Mill presents an annual sensitivity training program for all employees and board members to ensure that everyone who works at Paper Mill understands and commits to providing an environment that is accessible to all. Box office staff, for example, learn that they need to exit the box office to interact with someone with a disability because of the height of the box office windows.

## **Community Engagement**

In order to develop new programs and ensure the quality of existing ones, the manager of outreach and access programs consults with two advisory boards: one is focused on services for people with hearing impairments and one is focused on people with visual impairments. There are members on both boards with and without disabilities. The boards do not have regular meetings; they are available as needed and serve more as "sounding boards" for the playhouse, providing advice on such topics as new technology.

Also important to the program is direct feedback by members of the disability community. The manager attends productions during American Sign Language (ASL)-interpreted and audio-described performances and talks to audience members directly, using their suggestions to augment the program whenever possible. In addition, his involvement on other non-profit boards and attendance at conferences allows him to share information and ensures that Paper Mill is incorporating best practices in the field.

Paper Mill also hosts regional accessibility trainings in partnership with the New Jersey Cultural Access Network.

#### **Programs and Services**

Paper Mill Playhouse is committed to remaining accessible to people with disabilities by offering the following services:

- Open captioning and ASL interpretation performed together
- Courtesy wheelchairs to be used while in the building
- Sensory seminars, offered 90-minutes prior to each audio-described performance which allow audience members who are visually impaired to feel props, set pieces and costumes
- Discounted tickets for audience members who use an access service
- Recorded program information
- Open captioning, ASL interpretation or audio description for children's theatre performances and other events at the theatre
- Advertises access services in mainstream advertisements, on its Web site and to targeted groups
- Works with advocacy groups and school districts to inform the public and student groups
- Promotes programs at disability-focused conferences, and organizations and schools that serve people with disabilities
- Produces *Theatre for Everyone*, a brochure with up-to-date information about access services

#### **Evaluation**

Paper Mill assesses the impact of its access services primarily through its advisory boards. The manager of outreach and access programs also solicits informal feedback from audience members who take advantage of the playhouse's access services and from the artists who provide these services. Periodically, phone surveys are conducted with audience members on specific topics such as the timing of the sensory seminars.

#### **Tips for Success**

- Take advantage of resources in the community.
- Consider sharing an access committee or access advisory board with other organizations in the community.
- Assess the environment to determine who wants to attend your productions, and then determine what services you need to offer to make this happen.
- Don't commit to providing services or programs unless you know they are going to be successful.
- Don't expect overnight success.
- Advocates for access and inclusion must be always vigilant.

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# Mixed Blood Theatre Company Minneapolis, MN

Main Website: http://www.mixedblood.com

Accessibility Web Page: <a href="http://www.mixedblood.com">http://www.mixedblood.com</a> (click "Access")

#### **Point of Contact**

Jack Reuler Artistic Director

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#### Overview

The Mixed Blood Theatre Company is a professional, multi-racial theatre promoting cultural pluralism and individual equality through artistic excellence. Using theater as a vehicle for artistry, entertainment, education and social change, Mixed Blood Theatre addresses artificial barriers that keep people from succeeding in American society. Mixed Blood's purpose is to:

- Produce plays using culture-conscious casting
- Provide the finest forum in the nation for theatre artists of color to practice their craft
- Take artistic risks in the selection and production of plays
- Reach a non-traditional theatre audience
- Produce educational programs on racial and cultural themes

Presenting in a 200-seat theatre in an 1887 firehouse, Mixed Blood has an annual budget of approximately \$1.3 million and annual attendance of approximately 115,000. The company presents over 500 performances annually in its theatre, schools, churches, community centers, juvenile detention centers and workplaces.

Mixed Blood is a leader in the community because of its art. The company produces works by artists with disabilities, featuring artists with disabilities and about disability issues. Some of these are world premieres such Ken LaZebnik's *Vestibular Sense*, which won a best emerging playwright award from the American Theatre Critics Association. In partnership with <a href="Interact">Interact</a> Theatre, Mixed Blood also staged the first production of *The Boys Next Door* to feature actors with disabilities.

In 2005, the company received the VSA arts Minnesota Access Award.

## **Strategic Planning**

Thanks to a new staff member who was involved with the <u>PACER Center</u>, Mixed Blood staff realized in 2000 that they needed to expand their interpretation of their mission. Disability is an "artificial barrier that keeps people from succeeding in American society." In addition to the mission statement, the company specifically invites artists with disabilities to audition.

## **Professional Development**

Access and inclusion are part of all staff training workshops.

## **Community Engagement**

Mixed Blood is committed to programming by, with and for people with disabilities. Engaging people with diverse disabilities on stage, behind the scenes and in the audience has fostered a deeper relationship and level of trust with various communities. The administrative and artistic staff have also learned much more about how to collaborate with and accommodate diverse individuals as a result of "walking the walk."

The theater's mainstage productions target specific and different populations from one show to the next through building relationships with communities around each production and sustaining connections with those communities between targeted productions. This technique is about creating as much as finding audiences, and has been an effective means for generating audience members with various disabilities; for example, months before the production of Vestibular Sense, theater staff met with the staff of the <u>Fraser Institute</u> and gave them the script. In addition, they convened a group of parents of children with autism and an occupational therapist to discuss the project with the artists; contacted therapists and organizations that work with people with autism; attended <u>ARC of Minnesota</u>'s conference in Rochester, Minnesota, to promote the production statewide; and provided free preview tickets for autism information and parent network groups.

Mixed Blood also co-produces some shows with <u>Interact Center</u>'s theater company, a group comprised primarily of artists with disabilities. This partnership not only benefits the community, but it also provides Mixed Blood with access to quality actors and scripts that explore disability issues. Other partners include <u>VSA</u> arts <u>Minnesota</u> and Global Deaf Connection.

The company engages artists with disabilities to develop and produce projects by, for and about people with disabilities including:

- The History of Bowling playwright Mike Ervin, who is a quadriplegic, about physical, mental and acquired disabilities, featuring an actor who is a quadriplegic;
- The Boys Next Door, co-produced with <u>Interact Center</u>, about a group home for adults with developmental disabilities, featuring a cast of people with Down syndrome, mental illness, brain injury and physical disabilities;
- The Deaf Duckling by Aditi Kapil and Nicole Zapko, an artist who is deaf, about a woman who is deaf born into a hearing family, featuring ASL-fluent and actors who are deaf;
- Sweet Nothing In My Ear about cochlear implants, featuring renowned actress Terrylene, who is deaf; and
- Vestibular Sense by Ken LaZebnick about a high-functioning young man who has autism, featuring an actor with autism.

### **Programs and Services**

Mixed Blood is completely accessible for audience members and artists with disabilities. Services include:

- Stage access via ramps
- Captioning provided through a PowerPoint presentation
- Seating in the lobby
- Enhanced outdoor lighting
- Publicized run times for those making transport arrangements

#### **Evaluation**

Mixed Blood obtains direct feedback on its access services from audience members and artists who complete evaluation forms. The company measures success in achieving objectives against annual goals and long-range plans, and assesses how well staff promote access programs and services.

The company's innovative use of PowerPoint to provide captioning resulted from input from community members who are deaf. They educated staff on the extent to which people who are deaf are fluent in ASL (not everyone); people who use hearing aids and assisted listening devices are able to clearly understand speech (not always); and people who lip read can see artists' lips given theatrical lighting (it depends).

#### **Tips for Success**

- Consider people who are deaf as part of a culture and not people who have a disability.
- Do not assume that there is a single disability community.
- Make the commitment; do the work; and learn along the way.
- Visit and learn from performing arts organizations in your discipline that are primarily focused on presenting disability issues and working with artists with disabilities such as <a href="Deaf West">Deaf West</a> and the National Theatre Workshop of the Handicapped.

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# Museum Of Contemporary Art (MCA) Chicago, IL

Main Website: http://www.mcachicago.org

#### **Point of Contact**

Peter Taub

Direct or Performance Programs

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#### **Overview**

The mission of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) is to be an innovative and compelling center of contemporary art where the public can directly experience the work and ideas of living artists, and understand the historical, social and cultural context of the art of our time. The museum interweaves exhibitions, performances, collections and educational programs to excite, challenge and illuminate our visitors and to provide insight into the creative process. The MCA aspires to engage a broad and diverse audience, create a sense of community and be a place for contemplation, stimulation and discussion about contemporary art and culture.

The MCA produces a full range of performances, artist-audience encounters and support for the field in its 300-seat theatre built as part of the institution's new construction in the mid-1990s. Out of the \$14 million budget for the museum, approximately \$800,000 is allocated annually to direct expenses for the performing arts. Theatre attendance is approximately \$20,000 per year.

### Strategic Planning

In addition to its mission statement that references engaging a "broad and diverse audience," the MCA's performance department strives to integrate performance programs featuring artists with disabilities into its season, accompanied by

significant educational and audience development initiatives.

### **Professional Development**

Artists with disabilities present regular training and orientation workshops to museum staff from facilities engineering, education and visitor services departments.

### **Community Engagement**

The MCA engages the community primarily by presenting performances that feature artists with disabilities. The MCA has presented <u>Bill Shannon</u>, <u>AXIS Dance Company</u> and <u>Lynn Manning</u>. This focus broadens the museum's commitment to increasing arts access to include access not just for audience members with disabilities but also for the artists themselves.

Partnerships are another mechanism for engaging the community. The performance department does not rent out the theatre; instead it co-produces, which expands the knowledge pool; cross-fertilizes audiences; and leverages the existing resources and expertise to increase the production's impact. Approximately one-third of the performance programs are realized in partnership with various organizations, including Court Theatre, the Illinois Humanities Council, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, Young Chicago Authors and Little Black Pearl. As noted above, the MCA collaborated with over 50 cultural, academic and rehabilitation organizations to produce *Bodies of Work: the Chicago Festival of Disability Arts*.

Partnerships and other networks are important for the MCA's marketing efforts. Staff ask key contact people in constituent communities to be ambassadors, and give them the necessary materials and information.

### **Programs and Services**

The MCA initiated an on-going dialogue about city-wide arts access through the <u>League of Chicago Theaters (LCT)</u>, a group of professionals dedicated to enhancing the art of theater in the Chicago area through audience development and support services for theaters and theater professionals. The MCA staff helped to organize an Arts Access committee at LCT, the first committee in the country dedicated to promoting accessibility to performance programs across a wide range of venues.

The MCA also convened a consortium of over 50 cultural, academic and rehabilitation organizations to showcase the disability arts movement through <u>Bodies of Work</u>: the <u>Chicago Festival of Disability Arts</u>. Bodies of Work, the first festival of its kind in the United States, took place April 2006, with a second festival planned for 2009.

The MCA is accessible to visitors, audience members and artists and offers the following services:

- Courtesy wheelchairs for use at the theatre
- Low ticket prices to make theater-going accessible to audience members with budget restraints

#### **Evaluation**

The MCA engages people with disabilities in the on-going evaluation of the museum's physical facilities and its services for audience members with disabilities. Several years ago, the museum completed an exhaustive accessibility audit facilitated by artists, volunteers and audience members with disabilities. In addition, the MCA staff administers audience surveys; meets twice a year to review access services; and assesses services and performances by talking informally to audience members. They believe that the key evaluation question is "Is our work making a difference?"

### **Tips for Success**

- Seek advice from artists with disabilities and people with disabilities who live in your community.
- Understand that the disability community just like any other community is often politicized, and there are divergent opinions about how to do what needs to be done.

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# Paper Mill Playhouse Millburn, NJ

Main Website: <a href="http://www.papermill.org">http://www.papermill.org</a>

Accessibility Web Page: http://www.papermill.org/visit/accessibility.php

#### **Point of Contact**

Michael T. Mooney Manager of Outreach & Access Programs Email Address: mmooney@papermill.org

Phone: 973-379-3636 x2666

TTY: 973-376-2181

#### Overview

Paper Mill Playhouse preserves and nurtures the American musical theatre, and aspires to be a vital artistic and education center recognized throughout the region and the nation for its high-quality, innovative theatre and training programs. The theatre is committed to rediscovering and re-imagining classic musicals and plays, developing new musicals, training young and emerging artists, and ensuring that the theatre is accessible to all.

Founded in 1934, Paper Mill Playhouse raised the curtain on its first performance in 1938. After a fire in 1980, the playhouse reopened in 1982 with an art gallery and a 1,200 seat theatre. Its annual budget is approximately \$17 million, and yearly attendance is approximately 425,000.

As the first theatre in the country to schedule open-captioned performances, Paper Mill is a leader in access and inclusion. Paper Mill's leadership has been recognized by the <u>New Jersey Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing</u>, the <u>National Organization on Disability</u> and the <u>New Jersey State Council on the Arts</u>. Their access program received the <u>2003 VSA arts/MetLife Award</u> of Excellence in Arts Access, and Michael Mooney, the program's manager, received the <u>2003 Ann Klein Advocate Award for</u>

Service to Senior and Disability Communities.

## **Strategic Planning**

Paper Mill believes accessibility has to be part of your mission, outlook and purpose. Paper Mill explicitly states its commitment to access in its mission statement. In addition, the home page of its Web site includes the following sentence: "Paper Mill is one of the few theaters in the country that is fully accessible to individuals with disabilities."

## **Professional Development**

Paper Mill presents an annual sensitivity training program for all employees and board members to ensure that everyone who works at Paper Mill understands and commits to providing an environment that is accessible to all. Box office staff, for example, learn that they need to exit the box office to interact with someone with a disability because of the height of the box office windows.

## **Community Engagement**

In order to develop new programs and ensure the quality of existing ones, the manager of outreach and access programs consults with two advisory boards: one is focused on services for people with hearing impairments and one is focused on people with visual impairments. There are members on both boards with and without disabilities. The boards do not have regular meetings; they are available as needed and serve more as "sounding boards" for the playhouse, providing advice on such topics as new technology.

Also important to the program is direct feedback by members of the disability community. The manager attends productions during American Sign Language (ASL)-interpreted and audio-described performances and talks to audience members directly, using their suggestions to augment the program whenever possible. In addition, his involvement on other non-profit boards and attendance at conferences allows him to share information and ensures that Paper Mill is incorporating best practices in the field.

Paper Mill also hosts regional accessibility trainings in partnership with the New Jersey Cultural Access Network.

#### **Programs and Services**

Paper Mill Playhouse is committed to remaining accessible to people with disabilities by offering the following services:

- Open captioning and ASL interpretation performed together
- Courtesy wheelchairs to be used while in the building
- Sensory seminars, offered 90-minutes prior to each audio-described performance which allow audience members who are visually impaired to feel props, set pieces and costumes
- Discounted tickets for audience members who use an access service
- Recorded program information
- Open captioning, ASL interpretation or audio description for children's theatre performances and other events at the theatre
- Advertises access services in mainstream advertisements, on its Web site and to targeted groups
- Works with advocacy groups and school districts to inform the public and student groups
- Promotes programs at disability-focused conferences, and organizations and schools that serve people with disabilities
- Produces *Theatre for Everyone*, a brochure with up-to-date information about access services

#### **Evaluation**

Paper Mill assesses the impact of its access services primarily through its advisory boards. The manager of outreach and access programs also solicits informal feedback from audience members who take advantage of the playhouse's access services and from the artists who provide these services. Periodically, phone surveys are conducted with audience members on specific topics such as the timing of the sensory seminars.

#### **Tips for Success**

- Take advantage of resources in the community.
- Consider sharing an access committee or access advisory board with other organizations in the community.
- Assess the environment to determine who wants to attend your productions, and then determine what services you need to offer to make this happen.
- Don't commit to providing services or programs unless you know they are going to be successful.
- Don't expect overnight success.
- Advocates for access and inclusion must be always vigilant.

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# Victory Gardens Theater Chicago, IL

Main Website: http://www.victorygardens.org

Accessibility Web Page: <a href="http://www.victorygardens.org/content/about/access\_project">http://www.victorygardens.org/content/about/access\_project</a>

#### **Point of Contact**

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Michael Ervin

Co-director, Access Project

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#### **Overview**

Founded in 1974, Victory Gardens Theater is a not for profit, Tony Award recipient, dedicated to playwrights and their works. Emphasis is placed on the development of an ethnically and culturally diverse community of artists. Programs include five main stage productions; classes in all aspects of theater; outreach and educational activities serving the Chicago public schools by providing arts integrated curriculum units and authentic arts experiences; the access project; second stage productions and extensive rental and mentoring to developing companies; as well as playwright development programs such as readings, workshops and commissions.

Victory Gardens Theater presents productions in its new home, the recently renovated Biograph, which seats 299, and its former home that has two, 60-seat black box studios and one 192-seat main stage. The theatre's overall budget is approximately \$3.1 million, and yearly attendance is 98,000.

### Strategic Planning

A key program of Victory Gardens Theater is the access project, which encompasses all of the theater's services for people with disabilities. Now in its 14th season, this project's overarching goal is to create a truly barrier-free theatrical experience. This includes assistive technologies, a deep, institution-wide commitment to physical accessibility in terms of facility design (including backstage and dressing areas) and staff training, and ongoing performance programs that feature compelling, important, vital and diverse stories of and participation by persons with disabilities.

## **Professional Development**

The co-director of the access project leads annual workshops for front-of-house staff and periodically for all staff and board members. This training is based on a manual written by access project staff and reviewed by people with disabilities.

## **Community Engagement**

Victory Gardens Theater's access project represents a community partnership in which participants with disabilities play an active role in program design. All assistive services receive input from community members with disabilities. The access project is co-directed by Michael Ervin, who has muscular dystrophy and uses a wheelchair, and whose background as a disability playwright is ideally suited for access programming that represents both audience- and artist-centered activities. The co-directors of the *Access Project* each speak to community organizations that serve people with disabilities. Additionally, Victory Gardens maintains involvement among artists and audience members with disabilities in the form of an advisory council. The theater solicits feedback from community members and the advisory council as needed.

Victory Gardens Theater was one of the leaders in creating an arts access committee at the <u>League of Chicago Theaters (LCT)</u>, and in organizing the disability arts festival, <u>Bodies of Work: the Chicago Festival of Disability Arts</u>. In addition, Victory Gardens has trained most of the audio describers in Chicago through three annual workshops. The theater also loans its captioning equipment to other theaters in the community. As part of the transformation of the Biograph movie house to a state-of-the-art main stage for Victory Gardens, staff contracted with an architect who uses a wheelchair to review the facility's physical accessibility.

#### **Programs and Services**

Victory Gardens Theater is accessible to audience members and artists. Services include:

- Artist development workshops that teach the art of playwriting and performance to individuals with and without disabilities
- Play development opportunities for original works dealing with disability issues or written by playwrights who have disabilities
- Touch tours
- A series of performances, readings, movies and other events that promote, explore and celebrate disability culture
- Word-for-word captioning
- Concierge-style, open box offices with counters at varying and adjustable heights
- Access and inclusion information on all printed materials
- An access newsletter that reaches more than 2,000 individuals

#### **Evaluation**

Evaluation is conducted through surveys and focus groups with audience members, artists and members of the disability community. Victory Gardens also tracks ticket and subscription sales, and both of these have grown for access service performances and *Crip Slam*. In addition, the advisory council assesses the success of the theater's programs as it helps plan new and guide existing services.

### **Tips for Success**

- Include members of the disability community in the creation and design of all access services.
- Make a long-term commitment to access and inclusion and make it an integral part of your organization.
- Ensure that your access services are professional; for example, if you have professional actors, then you need professional audio describers.

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# Wheelock Family Theatre Boston, MA

Main Website: http://www.wheelock.edu/wft

Accessibility Web Page: http://www.wheelock.edu/wft/wftabout.asp#access

#### **Point of Contact**

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Phone: 617-879-2148

#### **Overview**

Established in 1981, Wheelock Family Theatre creates intergenerational and multicultural productions that provide a shared experience for the whole family. The theatre celebrates the diverse range of families found in the world today and seeks to unite them in the shared experience of live theatre. The theatre is especially dedicated to those who are historically underserved: people of color, people with disabilities and low-income families.

Devoted to the ideal of complete access, Wheelock rejects the notion that the arts should be available only to audiences of privilege. Their play selection, casting policy, affordable ticket prices, education programs and access provisions for people with disabilities reflect a commitment to inclusive, community-based theatre.

The theatre has a seating capacity of 650. The annual budget is approximately \$850,000, and theatre attendance is 27,000 a year with an additional 250-300 children and youth participating in classes and summer programs.

Wheelock's leadership in access and inclusion for audience members and artists, has been recognized by many state and national awards including:

- Excellence in Accessibility Leadership Award from the <u>Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts</u> <u>Christopher Reeve</u> Foundation
- Access Achievement Award from the Bay State Council of the Blind
- Service Award from the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Coming Up Taller Award for PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre from the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities

#### Strategic Planning

In addition to a mission statement that celebrates the diversity of families and specifically mentions people with disabilities, Wheelock prominently displays on its home page a link to information on accessibility services.

## **Professional Development**

Wheelock Family Theatre staff provides basic disability training for ushers, volunteers, theater members. Currently, they conduct annual, campus-wide disability awareness trainings with an additional, more focused workshop for ushers.

## **Community Engagement**

At Wheelock Family Theatre, community and collaboration are key values: community means that artists and audience members with disabilities tell staff—directly—what they need and want; collaboration means working with other arts organizations, human service agencies, schools and the private sector to be effective.

Through Wheelock's 19-member access advisory board, people with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities, reprensentatives from service organizations and consulting interpreters are actively involved in the development and evaluation of programming, outreach and services. Several access advisory board members who have disabilities also serve on the theatre's board of directors. The access advisory board meets three times a year plus communicates frequently by e-mail. In addition to this board, consultants who are deaf and consultants who are blind translate scripts, and coach interpreters and describers, respectively.

Wheelock also engages the community through partnerships such as a multi-year collaboration with <u>Perkins School for the Blind</u>. Students who are deaf and blind can attend one production a year at no cost and participate in workshops designed to enhance their experience at the production.

Wheelock regularly features productions created and/or performed by artists with disabilities, for example,

- My Hands Remember, a play inspired by the life of a Jewish woman who is deaf in Nazi-occupied Europe;
- Hey Sistah, Welcome Home, a multimedia production based on the work of poet Ayisha Knight, who is deaf;
- JazzArtSigns, co-produced with VSA arts of Massachusetts, featuring singer/educator Lisa Thorson, who is a quadriplegic; and
- A Nice Place to Live, an ASL play commissioned by Wheelock, on the history and culture of the deaf community on Martha's Vineyard island in the early nineteenth century.

#### **Programs and Services**

Since its first American Sign Language (ASL)-interpreted performance in 1981, Wheelock Family Theater has been accessible to audience members and artists. Services include:

• Interpreters who are deaf work as a team with those who are hearing to interpret a production

- A Wheelock faculty artist who is deaf presents drama workshops to partnership schools and leads a residency at Boston's public school for the deaf
- Audio-described performances include a live pre-show introduction
- Access information on every press release and advertisement

#### **Evaluation**

In addition to the evaluation provided through the access advisory board, the theatre also seeks feedback through informal focus groups, casual conversations at performances and formal surveys taken throughout the season. Within the last several years, the <a href="Theatre Communication Group">Theatre Communication Group</a> funded Wheelock to convene focus groups of potential audience members who are deaf, deaf and blind, physically disabled and blind. Each group, led by a member of the specific community, evaluated Wheelock's access services and recommended strategies to help make needed improvements.

## **Tips for Success**

- Ensure that everyone in your organization is committed to access and inclusion.
- Don't be discouraged with small audiences; be consistent and your numbers will increase.
- Don't expect to recoup your investment in access services.
- Encourage your board members and funders to attend performances that are interpreted or productions that focus on disability issues.
- Ensure that your Web site is accessible.
- Don't be discouraged by mistakes and celebrate your accomplishments.
- Market the names of your interpreters because many audience members follow their favorite interpreters.

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# **Commitment and Strategic Planning**

Commitment
Strategic Planning
Language

#### Commitment

A basic effective practice is an organization-wide commitment to access and inclusion. These values are explicitly and implicitly evident in strategic concepts such as vision, values, mission, goals and objectives. While the planning necessary to develop an organization's vision is bottom-up, typically beginning with internal and external assessment, translating vision into reality requires leadership from the executive staff and board of directors.

The awardees recognized by the "Arts Presenters/MetLife Award for Excellence and Innovation in Access" exhibit a variety of effective practices. Some have a broad mission or value statement with specific access goals and objectives. Some explicitly mention access in their missions. There is no one correct formula and each organization needs to determine what makes the most sense for its culture. The following awardees present a great variety of approaches.

Jack Reuler, Artistic Director of Mixed Blood Theatre Company, states "incorporating disability into our ongoing programming, planning, facility, artists, etc... is all mission-driven. We just expanded our horizons on the manifestation of the mission." The company's mission is:

The Mixed Blood Theatre Company is a professional, multi-racial theatre promoting cultural pluralism and individual equality through artistic excellence. Using theater as a vehicle for artistry, entertainment, education and social change, Mixed Blood Theatre addresses artificial barriers that keep people from succeeding in American society. Mixed Blood's purpose is to:

- Produce plays using culture-conscious casting
- Provide the finest forum in the nation for theatre artists of color to practice their craft
- Take artistic risks in the selection and production of plays
- Reach a non-traditional theatre audience
- Produce educational programs on racial and cultural themes

The Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities' commitment to access and inclusion starts with a broad mission statement, "We Open Worlds to You," that flows through its core objectives. These include being a leader in diverse and accessible programming, and serving as a regional and national model for excellence in the arts. The goal of their accessibility program is to ensure that all adults and children with disabilities have the opportunity to experience the arts by eliminating physical and programmatic barriers.

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The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts articulates its commitment through the objectives of its arts access program:

The goal of our arts access program is to be reflective of the diversity in our community and inclusive of people with disabilities at all levels-in the audience, as employees, interns and volunteers, and as performers and artistic staff. Our strategies for accomplishing our goal are to ensure that: 1) a commitment to access is pervasive in all departments and through all staff; 2) policies, procedures and practices address equal access for people with disabilities; 3) people with disabilities participate in the decision-making processes and implementation of arts access programs; 4) we focus on being responsive to the needs of the disability community and to changing technologies and attitudes; 5) services and accommodations are provided that reflect the center's over-all commitment to quality; and 6) the center takes leadership by modeling best practices in the field of arts and accessibility.

Paper Mill Playhouse specifically mentions accessibility in its mission statement:

Paper Mill Playhouse preserves and nurtures the American musical theatre, and aspires to be a vital artistic and education center recognized throughout the region and the nation for its high-quality, innovative theatre and training programs. The theatre is committed to rediscovering and re-imagining classic musicals and plays, developing new musicals, training young and emerging artists, and ensuring that the theatre is accessible to all.

Wheelock Family Theatre believes it is critical that a commitment to arts access be embedded at all levels of their organization-from the mission statement to strategic planning, from the board room to the box office, from the staff to the stage. They believe access will not succeed if it is considered to be a stream separate from an organization's lifeblood. They have increased their marketing efforts by including access symbols in ads and press releases. Their box office personnel must know the location of accessible seats and how to answer the TTY. Their ushers must know how to seat a person who is blind with a guide dog. Directors must be open to casting actors who use crutches or who have a learning disability.

## **Strategic Planning**

When organizations first started focusing on accessibility in the 1990s, one indicator of commitment was an access committee or advisory board, composed primarily of people with disabilities that held regular meetings and guided arts organizations on how to prepare and be responsive to the needs of people with disabilities. Today, some presenters have an advisory board that meets on a regular basis, and others have created a board committee focused all or in part on access. However, another technique is to diversify the board to include people with disabilities.

The performing arts organizations recognized by the Arts Presenters/MetLife Award use a combination of formal and informal mechanisms for consulting with informed constituents. Typically, their discussions include planning, programming and evaluation since these basic organizational elements are entwined.

It is often easier to recruit advisors if they do not have to commit to regularly scheduled meetings. In addition, it is an efficient

use of everyone's time and immediately responsive to the community to address issues and seize opportunities as they arise. Whatever configuration works best for the organizational culture is fine as long as it finds ways to rely on those with expertise in the field. The following are a few examples of how some organizations have taken an active role in this effort:

Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities demonstrates the evolution from a formal committee to ad-hoc focus groups:

In the early 1990s, the Colorado Council on the Arts required applicants to have an access plan to be eligible for funding. The center formed an access committee of community and audience members with disabilities to evaluate physical and programmatic accessibility. With the results of this evaluation, committee and staff members created a three-year access plan, which directed the center's ongoing efforts to solicit input on accessibility from people with disabilities. Initially, input included regular meetings of the access committee; however attendance declined over the years as the committee steadily solved problems. Today, the center uses focus groups that plan new and evaluate current services and activities; for example, when the staff at the center's history museum needed help building accessible, interactive exhibits, the education director recruited several people who use wheelchairs to evaluate a mock-up of the exhibit. Museum staff implemented their recommendations. This team returned to review the completed exhibit and provided advice on its interactive elements.

Wheelock Family Theatre (WFT) has both a formal advisory board that meets three times a year and ad-hoc focus groups:

Through WFT's 15-member Advisory Board, 19-member Access Advisory Board and 50-member "Friends of the Family Theatre" (composed of WFT parents and grandparents), people with disabilities and elders are actively involved in the development and evaluation of programming, outreach and services. The theater also seeks feedback through informal focus groups, casual conversations at performances and formal surveys taken throughout the season. A project funded by Theatre Communications Group allowed staff to connect with potential patrons in the deaf, deaf/blind, physically disabled and blindness communities through focus groups, each led by a member of the specific community. Each group evaluated WFT's access provisions and recommended strategies to help make needed improvements.

A variation that acknowledges the sometimes differing needs of people with various disabilities is to create several advisory boards or committees. Paper Mill Playhouse, for example, has one focused on services for people with hearing impairments and one for people with visual impairments.

Like the Arvada Center's approach to creating interactive exhibits, Victory Gardens Theatre and Flynn Center for the Performing Arts also demonstrate an effective use of focus groups to provide advice on specific questions:

- During the 2004-2005 season, Victory Gardens held a small focus group of patrons who are deaf in order to gain ideas of how to attract more audience members with hearing impairments and how to improve their assistive services. As a result, the theater is now utilizing sign-language interpreters that are deaf and known as Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDI).
- In the past, the Flynn Center randomly selected events to interpret in American Sign Language (ASL) or provide audio description. Deciding to be more intentional, education staff consulted with special education teachers and organized meetings with members of the deaf and hearing-impaired community. Questions discussed included how they found out about shows, and what shows they wanted to see. Center staff learned, for example, the importance of publicizing in advance the names of the ASL translators and audio describers.

## Language

A performing arts organization that pays attention to the accessibility of its printed materials and web site welcomes people with disabilities. Design and content reinforce the message of access and inclusion. Anything in writing should be easy to read for people with low vision. This means 12-point type and high contrast between background and type color. With respect to language, the primary rule is "people first" language (e.g., "people who are blind" or an "audience member who uses a wheelchair"). Other rules are:

• Never use the word "handicapped"; the word is "disability" or "accessible" (i.e., accessible parking or accessible

restroom).

- Never use a disability as an adjective: a "writer who is blind," not a "blind writer." Focus on the person, not the disability.
- Never use "special," because this term separates the individual from the group. For example, information is not required regarding the "special needs of the group," but "needs of the group."
- Never use euphemisms, such as "physically challenged" or "handicapable." These terms are condescending.
- 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. 3

3 Adapted from Design for Accessibility: A Cultural Administrator's Handbook (Washington, DC: National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 2003), 158.

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# **Community Engagement**

Developing Partnerships
Leadership in the Community
Building Audiences
Challenges Engaging the Community

## **Developing Partnerships**

Effective strategy for community engagement is to partner with organizations or institutions that serve people with disabilities. A staff member does not have to become an expert in disability issues when this expertise already exists in the community. The Flynn Center for the Performing Arts is one example of a presenting organization that has taken advantage of the available resources:

In 1997, the Flynn hosted a statewide, arts access training in collaboration with the Vermont State Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, Vermont Arts Council, Vermont Center for Independent Living and the New England ADA Technical Assistance Center. In successive site visits in 2000 and 2003, the Flynn identified a series of effective communication and accessible programming initiatives. Starting in 2001, the center began a multiyear collaboration with the Awareness Theater Company, a local group made up of adults with developmental disabilities performing original works, as well as a multiyear collaboration with VSA arts of Vermont to bring artists with disabilities to the Flynn stage.

Mixed Blood Theatre Company co-produces some shows with Interact Center's theater company-a group comprised primarily of artists with disabilities. This partnership not only benefits the community, but it also provides Mixed Blood with access to quality actors and scripts that explore disability issues.

Citi Center collaborated with the Horace Mann School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to plan, fund, implement and evaluate a four-week workshop on Shakespeare. A teaching artist explored the text of The Taming of the Shrew with students, who then created an original piece that connected Shakespeare's work to teen dating violence and issues in the deaf community. The students performed this work during the city-wide Celebrate Shakespeare Day organized by Citi Center.

The American Musical Theatre of San Jose collaborates with the California School for the Deaf. The Wheelock Family Theatre

has a partnership with the Perkins School for the Blind that includes complimentary tickets to one production and complementary workshops led by teaching artists. Children with disabilities benefit from seeing adults with disabilities lead classes and appear on stage.

## **Leadership in the Community**

Leadership in the community is often recognized through awards. Paper Mill Playhouse, for example, was acknowledged as a model for accessibility by the New Jersey Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the National Organization on Disability, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and the New Jersey Department of Recreation. In addition, their Access Program received the 2003 VSA arts/MetLife Award of Excellence in Arts Access and the program's manager received the 2003 Ann Klein Advocate Award for Service to Senior and Disability Communities. Citi Center, Wheelock Family Theatre and Mixed Blood Theatre Company have also won state or national awards.

Oftentimes recognition is acknowledged; however, in some instances, facilities like the Kentucky Center have missions to be leaders in the nation and in their state. The scope of what the Kentucky Center has done is impressive. Any one of their initiatives would be a good starting point for any performing arts organization that strives to be a community leader. Their partnership with the Kentucky Arts Council allowed the center to increase its outreach efforts in access services, first offering training and coordinating the loan of equipment to organizations throughout the state, and later providing workshops in ADA legislation and arts accessibility in all five regions of the state. New projects resulted from the growth in these access services, including workshops for artists and educators, a monthly electronic newsletter on arts access and an increase of technical assistance. As part of the most recent partnership, a marketing workshop specific to communities of persons with disabilities has been developed in conjunction with the State Arts Partnership for Cultural Participation (START). START is an initiative of the Wallace-Readers Digest Fund to broaden public participation in the arts. The Kentucky Center's access services are committed to providing access to the arts for all people in the community.

In November 2002, the Kentucky Center established The Arts Access Forum to increase art opportunities for organizations that work with individuals of diverse abilities in the Louisville metro community. The primary focus has been to develop partnerships between arts and cultural organizations, artists and organizations that work with people of diverse abilities. Currently, this program has 34 member organizations. Forty-four people who represent the member organizations meet monthly to develop arts opportunities, share information and resources that enable individuals of diverse abilities to participate fully in arts projects. The Arts Access Forum is awarding small grants to member organizations for projects or activities such as enabling individuals to attend a performance that is audio described or captioned and have a pre- and post- show discussion with a theater educator, or bringing an artist in to their organization to provide an arts experience for their clients.

Developing an organization-wide commitment to access and inclusion is great, but advocating for these values beyond the walls of the facility helps demonstrate a broader and more vital effort to involve the community. Many of the awardees are leaders in their communities, regions, and nationwide. The following organizations have done a great job of engaging the community:

- Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities shares its shadow interpretation training manual and CD with performing arts groups across the country.
- The Museum of Contemporary Art and Victory Gardens Theatre were instrumental in organizing an arts access committee for the League of Chicago Theatres. They also were leaders in planning and producing the "Bodies of Work: the Chicago Festival of Disability Art", an event that involved 50 cultural, academic and rehabilitation organizations.
- The Flynn Center for the Performing Arts initiated and guided a six-week, six-site New England tour of AXIS Dance Company, which included fostering intensive residencies in each community, overseeing access initiatives and convening planning meetings among regional presenters, artists and representatives of the company.

## **Building Audiences**

Collaborating with organizations and institutions and involving individuals with disabilities in access committees, advisory boards and focus groups also give presenters a network of community members who are invested in seeing the organization

thrive. They are the natural messengers to help raise public awareness and build audiences from the inside out.

Most of the Arts Presenters/MetLife awardees cite building audiences as a challenge because it depends in large measure on establishing trust. Keys to success are consistency and a multi-pronged campaign that targets the disability community, usually through partners and advisors, and includes accessibility information on all marketing materials. More important, organizations should explore disability issues on stage and hire actors with disabilities. Brown and Novak refer to this as curating:

The data suggest that audiences generally choose programs that validate and reinforce their cultural identity. Therefore, in selecting programs, curators curate not only the art but also the constituency for an arts institution. Constituency definition is the highest level policy decision that an arts organization can make.

The following organizations have utilized creative techniques to build their audiences.

Mixed Blood Theatre Company provides a model of how to curate audiences and use partners to help spread the word. The theater's main stage productions target specific and different populations from one show to the next to attract non-traditional audiences and artists. Nontraditional audiences are attracted because the theater builds relationships with communities around each production and sustains connections with those communities between targeted productions. The grassroots technique is labor-intensive, as it is about creating as much as finding audiences, but has proven to be a great way to engage those who have little or no tradition of theater attendance. This approach has been an effective means for generating audience members with various disabilities as well as different culturally specific audiences. This marketing effort has been strengthened by Mixed Blood's commitment to programming by, with and for people with disabilities. In addition, the administrative and artistic staff have learned much more about how to collaborate with and accommodate diverse individuals as a result of "walking the walk."

Mixed Blood attracted more than 100 people in wheelchairs to productions of The History of Bowling, and many more people with various disabilities to The Boys Next Door. Co-promotions (via e-mail and events) with Deaf Minnesota and others brought record attendance among deaf or hard-of-hearing patrons for regular and matinee performances of Sweet Nothing in My Ear. Demand for The Deaf Duckling across the region continues. Months before the production of Vestibular Sense, theater staff met with the staff of the Fraser Institute (a well-established and large community resource center) and gave them the script. In addition, they:

- convened a group of parents of children with autism and an occupational therapist to discuss the project with the artists;
- contacted therapists and organizations that work with people with autism;
- attended ARC of Minnesota's conference in Rochester, Minnesota, to promote the production statewide; and
- provided free preview tickets for autism information and parent network groups.

While also committed to building audiences from the inside out, the Kentucky Center has a strong marketing campaign featuring targeted communications to the disability community and general communications that highlight accessibility services:

- The Kentucky Center has a section on their website devoted to accessibility.
- Access KCARD increases awareness of the Center's access programs, thereby increasing the numbers of persons
  experiencing the arts. Access KCARD allows individuals and groups that work with individuals with disabilities to
  purchase reduced-price tickets to selected performances. The goal is to develop audiences who have previously not
  considered the theater experience one in which they could fully participate with their family and friends.
- The Center distributes the Arts Access E-newsletter monthly to over 100 individuals working in the arts in Kentucky. This ongoing educational tool for arts access features information on grants and scholarships, access products, practical tips and a calendar of accessible art offerings.
- In fall/winter and spring/summer, the Center publishes an Access Brochure and sends it to an access mailing list of over 700 individuals and organizations. It is also placed in the facility and around the community.
- A half-page Access Services Flyer is available throughout the facility as a quick reference list of all access services provided by the center and the information necessary to access those services.
- The Kentucky Center's 2004 Directory of Organizations Serving People with Disabilities and Older Americans lists more than 800 organizations that work with people with disabilities in Kentucky. A one-of-a-kind resource, the directory

- includes population statistics for people with disabilities divided by region and county, and by disability.
- Backstage Pass (the news magazine and program), the season brochure and all other promotional materials produced by the Center contain accessibility information and symbols.
- Periodically, the Center sends an e-mail blast to patrons who use audio description and caption theater to advise them of available services.

A performing arts organization that is accessible and inclusive not only engages people with disabilities, but it also educates all community members about these issues. Community engagement does not mean "outreach," which implies a one-directional relationship from the organization to the community; it means reciprocity, collaboration and trust. Ideally, everyone learns about our commonalities and appreciates our diversity. Making an effort to include people with disabilities on stage is an important component. Effective presenters understand that community members feel engaged with the art when they see themselves-and their issues-on stage:

A large chunk of a professional presenter's job is to fill in the gaps of cultural experience in the community, but the other half of that job is to recognize the specific interests and needs of the community. That might mean having ethnic and heritage programming that reflects the demographic, economic or political range in the community. It might mean providing space for community organizations to perform. It certainly means making sure your community has an active voice in programming. 5

The more community members feel connected to an organization, the greater the chance that they will participate as audience members, artists, donors, volunteers and staff.

## **Challenges Engaging the Community**

While establishing trust is an overall challenge, there are specific issues for organizations to be aware of as they engage the community and build audiences:

- People who are deaf or hard of hearing tend to be more interactive as a social group than people who are blind or visually impaired.
- People who are born deaf have different needs and interests than those who become deaf later in life.
- People with disabilities sometimes choose not to self-identify or join disability-focused organizations, so they are more difficult to find.
- Older adults often don't consider that they have a disability, yet they take advantage of assistive listening devices and large-print programs among other services.
- Staff members who are responsible for creating marketing materials sometimes emphasize design over readability.
- People with disabilities often have difficulty finding reliable transportation.
- People without disabilities may be reluctant to attend performances that feature artists with disabilities.

Remember that the first step in building audiences and engaging the community is to ensure that the facility and programs welcome people with disabilities.

4 Alan S. Brown and Jennifer L. Novak, "Assessing the Intrinsic Impacts of a Live Performance" (Fairfax, VA, Cambridge, MA and San Francisco: WolfBrown, January 2008), 20-21.

5 Andrew Taylor, director of the Bolz Center for Arts Administration at the University of Wisconsin, quoted by Joe Nickell, "The Culture of Here and Now: Regionalism's BIG Surprise," Inside Arts (Washington, DC: Association of Performing Arts Presenters, January/February 2008).



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# **Programming and Services**

"It is less about learning how to provide a service, and it is more about understanding and meeting the needs of individuals. It is about changing us so we work for them."

- Martha Newman, The Kentucky Center

**Professional Development** 

Physical Accessibility

Accessibility for Artists

Programmatic Accessibility

Challenges with Physical and Programmatic Accessibility

#### **Professional Development**

Announcing that the organization is committed to access and inclusion is important, but well-crafted statements are not enough. These values need to be communicated to staff and volunteers, accompanied by training about how to make people with disabilities feel welcome in the facility. Most of the presenting arts organizations that have received awards demonstrate their commitment by providing professional development to all staff and volunteers plus additional, specific training for front-of-house staff. Frequency varies from every year to every couple of years or as needed for new personnel. Occasionally, trainings are conducted by partner organizations with particular expertise such as VSA arts. Written manuals or videos/DVDs often supplement one-on-one and group workshops.

Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities utilizes a few effective strategies for training its staff and volunteers:

- periodic, in-depth sessions conducted by VSA arts Colorado;
- a training video created in collaboration with VSA arts Colorado, the Denver Scientific and Cultural Facilities District and Denver Center Media;
- a section dedicated to accessibility in the written manual for ushers;
- group and one-on-one training sessions conducted by the education director; and
- diversity training sessions that include topics on accessibility.

The Kentucky Center also has a comprehensive professional development plan. The director of access services annually conducts training for new staff and volunteers, and provides an annual refresher workshop for everyone. The basic training includes:

- an overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act;
- basic tips for interacting with people with disabilities, such as appropriate language;
- the center's access services, and how to receive them; and
- the center's access policies.

In addition, five departments-ticketing, custodial, maintenance, security and customer service-receive additional training. For example, the custodial staff is not only instructed to remove seats in the theaters but they are trained on why it needs to be done.

Other illustrative approaches are:

- At the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts, all staff members participate in workshops on the Americans with Disabilities Act and disability awareness. Each relevant department has a staff member on an internal access taskforce, and these individuals participate in more in-depth, ongoing training.
- Staff at Wheelock Family Theatre started with providing basic disability training for ushers and volunteers. The next year, they expanded this to include all theater members and related the training to the first show of the season. Currently, they conduct annual campus-wide disability awareness trainings.

If leaders of presenting arts organizations succeed in transmitting the values of access and inclusion to staff and volunteers, engaging people with disabilities becomes part of everyone's daily routine. It is not "special." Performing arts organizations engage artists and audience members with disabilities by routinely providing a wide range of quality physical and programmatic accessibility services. Most of the performing arts organizations recognized by the Arts Presenters/MetLife award have comprehensive, high-quality physical and programmatic accessibility on both sides of the stage and in their education departments. Services are informed by community members and provided by professionals. Effective presenters go beyond the Americans with Disabilities Act and constantly search out new technologies and new ideas.

## **Physical Accessibility**

Accessibility services offered by Arts Presenters/MetLife awardees include:

- TTY and telephone relay services are available.
- The theater publicizes performance run times for those making transportation arrangements.
- Designated parking spaces are conveniently located.
- Outside lighting around the theater is bright.
- There are automated doors at all entrances and emergency exits.
- Entrances are on grade, doorways are wide, and railings are available where needed.
- Accessible water fountains and restroom facilities are available and centrally located.
- Loaner wheelchairs are available. An audience member might need assistance, for example, getting from the theater entrance to his or her seat.
- There is raised-letter and Braille signage throughout the facility.
- The box office and concession stand are at a height that can be easily used by all visitors.
- There is seating in the lobby.
- Integrated, dispersed seating is available for audience members who use wheelchairs next to seats for companions, friends or family members.
- Armless seats are available for audience members who want to transfer from a wheelchair or scooter.
- Front seats are available for audience members who lip read.
- Assistive listening devices are available for all performances. Ideally, these are lightweight and without wires or cables, so that audience members can use them anywhere in the theater.

- American Sign Language interpretation is scheduled for all shows and available upon request for children's performances and educational programs.
- Captioned performances are scheduled for every show and available upon request for children's performances and educational programs.
- Consultants who are deaf advise ASL interpreters and captioners.
- Consultants who are blind advise audio describers.
- Audio-described performances are scheduled for every show and available upon request for children's performances.
- Braille and large-print programs are available for all performances.
- Recorded program information on tape or on the second channel of assistive listening devices is made available at all
  times or upon request.
- Sensory or touch tours are available at scheduled times for each show. Examples include:
  - Paper Mill Playhouse offers a "Sensory Seminar" for three performances of each musical and play. These preperformance seminars (1.5 hours prior to an audio-described performance) allow audience members to feel props, set pieces and costumes in order to give them a better understanding of a character's appearance, the design elements and the time period of the production.
  - o Preceding each audio-described performance, Victory Gardens Theatre invites audience members who are blind or have low vision to have a tactile experience with some of the visual elements of the show. They explore a three-dimensional model of the floor plan of the set, complete with Braille labels. Next, they are introduced to members of artistic staff and design team, engaging in lively discussion of the play. The group then takes a guided tour of the set including the different levels of the stage, the furniture and the props. Cast members greet everyone to provide voice recognition, and they give tour participants a chance to feel any significant costume pieces and ask additional questions.
- A ramp between the stage and audience so that actors with disabilities can move into the theater and audience members with disabilities, particularly for a children's show, can volunteer to go on stage.
- For performing arts centers with gallery space, taped audio-tours of the art are available.
- Captioning is provided for audience members who are not fluent in sign language, are unable to read lips because of stage lighting or desire clarity of speech. It can also be used for bilingual productions.
- Discounted tickets are available to organizations that serve people with disabilities and directly to people with disabilities and one companion. This is often part of a larger program that provides discounted tickets to other community members such as military personnel and students.
- Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities also provides two services unique among the awardees: shadow
  interpretation of scheduled performances and Squiggles, a playground that is accessible to children and adults who are
  blind or who have low vision or who have limited mobility.
- The American Musical Theatre of San Jose uses a Personal Captioning System (PCS) that transmits CART to individual, low-light, digital monitors positioned on a gooseneck stand directly in front of the audience member or to the person's PDA.
- Victory Gardens Theatre and Caption First, Inc. developed a word-for-word captioning system that allows audience
  members who are deaf to read actor dialogue, music and sound effects. This system interfaces with a large screen or
  individual monitors.
- Mixed Blood Theatre Company adapts scripts into a PowerPoint presentation with one-two lines per screen, and projects the images either above the stage or to monitors in the theater.

## **Accessibility for Artists**

Accessibility services for artists include many of the same features that make performing arts organizations welcoming to audience members with disabilities. Additionally,

- there is a private accessible dressing room for those who might not be comfortable in the group dressing room;
- group dressing rooms are fully accessible;
- all parts of the backstage and stage are accessible by ramp, elevator or lift; and
- the control booth is fully accessible.

## **Programmatic Accessibility**

Presenting people with disabilities on stage and presenting works by artists with disabilities build trust with the community of people with disabilities; educates all community members about disabilities; and deepens and broadens a presenters' understanding of access and inclusion.

Some of the grantees present disability-related issues written by and featuring artists with disabilities. Wheelock Family Theatre (WFT) is a good example:

- WFT regularly premieres work created and/or performed by people with disabilities, including My Hands Remember (a play inspired by the life of a deaf Jewish woman in Nazi-occupied Europe), Hey Sistah, Welcome Home (a multimedia production based on the work of deaf poet Ayisha Knight) and JazzArtSigns, co-produced with VSA arts of Massachusetts, featuring singer/educator Lisa Thorson, who is a quadriplegic.
   The theater also commissioned playwrights Adrian Blue and Catherine Rush to create A Nice Place to Live, an American Sign Language play, based on the history and culture of the deaf community on Martha's Vineyard in the early
  - American Sign Language play, based on the history and culture of the deaf community on Martha's Vineyard in the early nineteenth century. Staged readings of the play were performed by a cast of ten deaf and hearing middle school students and two ASL-fluent adults at the Harwich Junior Theatre on Cape Cod and the Vineyard Playhouse on Martha's Vineyard, and WFT produced the piece on its main stage.

It is not a coincidence that the presenters who feature artists with disabilities and disability issues on stage also offer other types of effective programs:

- Each season, Victory Gardens Theatre hosts three, free, eight-week Artist Development Workshops designed to engage people with disabilities in the creative side of theater. Led by a nationally recognized playwright, the workshops integrate people with and without disabilities and teach participants to write, perform, critique and revise original works for the stage. The workshops culminate in a public reading and reception at the theater.

  Additionally, at least two plays developed through the workshops are selected annually for Victory Gardens' In-House Reading Program. Readings are conducted in front of the theater's artistic leadership only, allowing for more personalized and direct feedback on the playwright's character development, plot, dialogue, etc. Plays that show outstanding artistic promise are considered for Victory Gardens' Readers Theater Program, a series of public readings of new works by emerging playwrights.
  - Victory Gardens also created a unique, ongoing performance series called Crip Slam Sundays. The series includes performances, readings, movies and other events that promote, explore and celebrate disability culture.
- The six-and-a-half week, six-site New England tour of AXIS Dance Company, initiated and directed by the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts, included these activities:
  - o A new work by Ann Carlson commissioned for AXIS.
  - A day of integrated dance with AXIS, featuring a video/lecture/discussion with company members, a
     "Fundamentals of Physically Integrated Dance" class for movers of all abilities and experience, and a master class for dance teachers, choreographers and professional-level dancers to learn about ways to be more inclusive in their own teaching and choreography.
  - Various disability sensitivity workshops with a wide variety of constituencies from the business association in downtown Burlington to Flynn Center staff, board members and volunteers.
  - Day-long residencies in area schools plus student and teacher training workshops.
  - o University of Vermont campus workshops in conjunction with "Deaf and Disability Awareness Month."
  - Workshops by AXIS for recreational, occupational and physical therapists to learn new movement-based exercises and philosophies to share with clients.

## **Challenges with Physical and Programmatic Accessibility**

Implementing physical and programmatic accessibility is not always easy. Most of the performing arts organizations recognized by the Arts Presenters/MetLife award agree that it is challenging to:

- find quality works about disability issues or even promising playwrights to nurture;
- locate excellent actors or performers with disabilities, and integrated companies or those comprised solely of performers with disabilities;
- schedule into a season a significant number of quality performers with disabilities and works that explore disability issues;
- find money to implement programs, obtain new technology and train quality American Sign Language interpreters and audio describers;
- know how to communicate effectively with the many different segments of the disability community; and
- integrate children with and without disabilities into education programs so that everyone is perceived to be equal. Presenters that are also rental or ticketing agents find it challenging to negotiate accessibility issues with different companies who might not share a commitment to access and inclusion.

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## **Evaluation**

#### Lessons Learned

Planning, implementation and evaluation are critical success factors for organizations to meet their accessibility goals. When effectively executed all three rely on community engagement, advisory committees, ad-hoc focus groups and individual feedback to inform new and evaluate existing services. The leaders recommend using outcome-based evaluations which explore how target audiences change as a result of accessibility program initiatives, and whether those initiatives met their stated goals.

Qualitative and quantitative analysis are perhaps the most common ways to analyze the data collected during the evaluation process:

- Qualitative
  - o Type: anecdotes, reactions, impressions, feelings
  - o Method: interviews, observations, focus groups, journals
  - o Analysis: words, pictures, objects
- Quantitative
  - o Type: numbers, statistics
  - o Method: surveys, questionnaires
  - o Analysis: numerical data

The qualitative method is further characterized as "deep" and the quantitative method as objective.

Citi Center effectively conducts an outcome-based evaluation for its education programs, using a logic model that addresses young people and diverse communities.

Most of the Arts Presenters/MetLife awardees evaluate their access and inclusion by:

- encouraging people who use accessibility services to complete a survey each time they attend a performance;
- mailing surveys annually to those who use the services;
- asking workshop attendees to complete surveys;
- surveying all audience members;

- conducting telephone polls on specific questions, such as why only half of the audience members who take advantage of audio description attend the sensory or touch tours; and
- soliciting feedback during casual conversations at performances and during informal focus groups.

#### Several additional evaluation methods include:

- The Flynn Center for the Performing Arts implemented a review of their "Access Transition Plan" by the staff accessibility task force. Members look at accomplishments and identify new goals.
- The Museum of Contemporary Art conducted an extensive accessibility audit facilitated by artists, volunteers and audience members with disabilities.

While all of the awardees use a variety of quantitative measures to track attendance and participation, most find it impossible to count the number of people with disabilities who attend performances. One strategy is to count the number of people who pick up assistive listening devices or buy a ticket for an accessible seat; it is not possible to count the number who view captions on a screen or who have a developmental disability.

#### **Lessons Learned**

- "As humans, we believe that everyone should be treated fairly."
- American Musical Theatre of San Jose

For most performing arts organizations, the future means both opportunity and uncertainty. Implementing new programs and services, and working with new artists is exciting. Finding and allocating financial and human resources is a challenge, particularly for access and inclusion. What is the budget for commitment? What is the return on investment for community engagement?

We don't expect to get our money back for our access services. We don't expect it to be an equal return. You can't. That is a setup for failure. When we provide services for audience members who are deaf and blind, it takes two interpreters per person as well as the interpreters on stage. The cost is about \$1,200 per person. And most people with disabilities pay nothing or at most \$10 per person. When we performed The Miracle Worker, 14 people who are deaf and blind attended, which meant 28 interpreters plus two on stage plus a separate consultant. After the show, 10 of these 14 audience members created their own play. This is the pay-off. (Jody Steiner, Wheelock Family Theatre)

The awardees recognized by the Arts Presenters/MetLife award know that consistency, community and collaboration require persistence, patience and passion. The following summary of what they have learned about access and inclusion is meant to guide organizations in welcoming all community members and engaging them in the organization's mission and goals.

- Start with commitment and enthusiasm.
- Commit to professionalism in accessibility and implementing services.
- Assess the environment, consult with the community and don't expect overnight results.
- Be always vigilant and assertive to ensure that people with disabilities feel welcome.
- Manage the organization's expectations because progress will be slow.
- Be honest about the organization's limitations and ask for help from the targeted community.
- Identify mentors and seek advice at conferences such as the <u>Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability</u> (LEAD), organized by the Kennedy Center.
- Have a full-time or part-time staff person take the lead (i.e., be the "nag") for access and inclusion.
- Include some responsibility for access and inclusion in everyone's job description.
- Use any award or recognition to leverage visibility for access and inclusion internally and externally.
- Engage a focus group or access committee in generating public interest about the accessibility program.
- Convene a separate focus group with community members who are deaf because people who are deaf typically self-identify as a unique culture.

- Ensure that board members, funders and community leaders attend performances that feature actors with disabilities and are about disability issues. If possible, orchestrate a discussion in which other audience members talk with these leaders about the impact of the work.
- Share an accessibility board or committee with other small organizations in the community.

The performing arts organizations recognized by the "Arts Presenters/MetLife Award for Excellence and Innovation in Access" understand the importance of access and inclusion. To emulate their success, commitment to these values should infuse every aspect of the organization. It is important to engage diverse people of all abilities as audience members, advisors and artists and present issues that explore and illuminate our differences and commonalities. Being a vital community asset means that the organization is vital to all community members.

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