

ReelAccess: A Guide to Accessible Film Festivals and Screenings

So Everyone Feels Welcome



Accessibility from the Start -

if you plan with accessibility in mind, you will create a welcoming environment and avoid creating new barriers!

ReelAbilities

TORONTO

So Everyone Feels Welcome!

From large-scale film festivals to individual film screenings, this booklet will give you resources on accessibility for people with disabilities so the magic of cinema is available to everyone! **Accessibility is a journey: use this guide on your path to becoming more accessible.**

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Planning Your Festival

Consult People with Disabilities

Consult filmgoers with different kinds of access needs to get their feedback on how your festival or screening can be more accessible. Consider setting up an accessibility committee.

Selecting your films

Consider the work of artists, filmmakers, and actors, who are Deaf or who have disabilities in selecting your films, and offer films that offer perspectives on disability culture in your festival lineup.

Select films that come with captioning and audio description wherever possible.

(See Venue Technical Needs Section)



The Venue(s)

Before choosing the theatre(s) for your festival or screening consider access points for all film goers.

Entrances

- Entrance ways to the venue, theatre, concession stand and bathrooms should either be on the ground floor or able to be accessed by either a ramp or elevator.
- Ensure that entryways have enough space for mobility devices (such as wheelchairs, walkers, scooters, and canes) to pass through and that all pathways are unobstructed.
- If doorways do not have automatic openers, you may be able to prop doors open or station volunteers to assist.
- Elevators should have low buttons for wheelchair users, and Braille or raised number markings, or audible floor announcements.

Accessible Parking and Transportation

- Ensure that there is convenient accessible parking, and that the venue is close to accessible public transit. Know where accessible transit passenger pick-up and drop-off areas are located.

Washrooms

- Ensure that washrooms are accessible and that the floor area beyond the swing of the door has sufficient space for a walker or wheelchair. Ensure that grab bars are available and that a person using a wheelchair can reach the sink, soap and paper towels.

Theatre Seating

Everybody has a favourite section in the theatre to watch a film from, so make space available to allow people with disabilities to choose their own theatre seats, and not be seated in a designated section for people with disabilities. Ensure there is support for people who would prefer to choose their seats with railings, usher assistance (if requested) and give enough time between doors opening and the start of the film to make sure everyone is seated ahead of time.

- Do your best to accommodate people with disabilities so that they can share the entire screening experience with their friends, family, companion, support person or service animal.
- Most theatres have limited accessible seating. Your festival can better support people with disabilities by ensuring that you choose venues that provide at least 10% overall accessible seats that have unobstructed views of the stage/screen and have the option of companion seating.
- Ensure that sightlines to sign language interpreters are clear and that reserved seating close to interpreters is available for Deaf or hard of hearing audience members on request.
- Secure an area to store mobility devices such as walkers, scooters and wheelchairs for people who wish to transfer into a regular seat to enjoy the film. Have usher support available to return the devices to them at the end of the film.
- Ushers should be available to assist people who need assistance to access washrooms or concessions during the film.



Stage Area

- If your event uses a stage for introductions, panel discussions or artist talks after the film, consider stage access for people who use mobility devices.
- Ensure that all speakers use microphones.
- Stay on schedule – people who use specialized accessible transportation services need to leave your event on time.
- Repeat any questions from the audience or use a microphone for audience questions and answers.
- Use adjustable height podiums.

Service Animals

Service animals are not pets. They work to make life easier for people with disabilities, and they are welcome in public areas including where food is served (though not where food is prepared).

- Make sure there is a relief area for these animals, and make sure their owners know where it is. Also, like your other film goers, service animals can get thirsty. Having a water bowl on hand is a very good way to make a film goer with a service animal feel welcome.



Below is a listing of the most commonly used assistive devices that may be helpful for your audiences.

Where possible, select venues that have technical capacity for assistive devices.

Venue Technical Needs

Captioning: Both Open (on screen for all to see) and Closed Captions (available to the individual) offer synchronized text descriptions that display dialogue, and describe relevant sounds for audience members to be able to follow the action. Captioning makes films accessible to people who are Deaf or hard of hearing or use assistive listening devices, and can be helpful for everyone. You can also arrange to have the film captioned by working with the filmmaker/distributor and a captioning firm. Some venues also offer CaptiView technology which allows individual audience members to access captioning. Consider having all advertising and festival bumpers captioned.

Audio Description (AD): AD of the activities which are taking place on-screen offers audience members who are blind or have low vision an equal opportunity to fully immerse themselves in the film. AD can be pre-recorded so that the audience member participates by listening through a headset or, as a low-cost alternative, there are also trained support workers who can offer this same service by sitting next to the audience member and verbally sharing the descriptions in the natural pauses and rhythms of the film. At this time, pre-recorded AD is not always offered with the films you may be licensing for your film festival; make sure to check ahead.

Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART): CART is simultaneous transcription of what is being said at a talk, lecture, panel discussion or perhaps even a film. Captions can be read either on an individual personal computer or smart phone, or on a large screen so multiple people can participate. **See Dive Deeper Section for provider options.**

Sign Language Interpretation: American Sign Language (ASL) and Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) are languages like any other and the predominant users of sign language are people who are Deaf, or hard of hearing. By offering sign language interpretation during your supplementary film festival programming where there are speakers (such as artist talks, panel discussions and during the introduction and closing of your screenings), you are offering equal opportunities for all people in your audience to participate. You can offer sign language interpretation as a given, or offer it on request in advance. Sign language interpreters need to be well lit.

Sensory-Friendly and Relaxed Screenings

A sensory-friendly or relaxed screening is specifically designed to welcome people who will benefit from a more relaxed environment, including people with Autism Spectrum Disorder, sensory and communication disorders, or a learning disability. A sensory-friendly screening means:

- There is a relaxed attitude to noise and movement.
- House lights remain on at a dim level, and sound is slightly lower.
- The nature of the screenings is highlighted in communications in advance, and also when introducing the film so that the audience knows what to expect.
- A designated rest area outside the screening room may be offered.

Some accessibility features, like ASL, CART, captioning, audio description may require investment which should be included in your costs when planning. Others are no or low-cost changes you can make, like volunteers who can help with way-finding, live audio/description, and changes you to your communications (see Communications section).



Communications

- Once you know about the accessibility features of your venue, make sure to inform your film goers about them as well. Provide as much information as possible in advance. If a film is subtitled, indicate this, and for films with mixed languages, indicate how many/which of these languages are subtitled.
- Provide contact information so film goers with disabilities can learn about the accessibility features available and request accommodations so they can fully participate. Include the universal accessibility symbols. (See image below)
- Add an accessibility statement to all of your materials: [Organization] is committed to accessibility. Please contact [NAME] by [phone and email] to let us know about your access needs.
- Include start and ending time of all events.
- Include content description so audience members can make an informed decision about attending films that include graphic depictions of abuse, suicide or other potentially distressing situations.
- Offer a variety of ways to communicate, such as telephone, email and in person, to ensure that your film goers with disabilities receive the information they need, and are able to provide information back to you in a way that works best for them.
- Use at least 14 point sans serif fonts such as **Arial**, **Verdana** or **Source Sans Pro** for print materials.
- Ensure that websites are keyboard navigable, and use alternative text to describe any images.
- Make presentation, lecture, or speech texts available in advance where possible.
- If you offer Audience Awards for various films, consider offering ballots in multiple formats to ensure everyone can vote.



ReelAbilities Film Festival is committed to accessibility.
Please refer to each film or event listing for accessibility information.



Ticketing

- Consider offering a financially accessible ticket option for people who have low or fixed incomes. If your festival is able to, provide free (or low-cost) companion seating for people who require the assistance of a support person to participate and make this information public in advance.
- Consider how people with disabilities are going to purchase tickets - if they do not have access to a computer or your website is not accessible, can they purchase by phone? Do they have to pick up the tickets in person before the festival or can they be sent electronically or mailed? Offer multiple options. If rush tickets will be available the day of the screening, ensure that the lineup area is wheelchair accessible, and ideally covered in case of inclement weather.

Customer Service and Volunteers

- Uninformed ushers, box office or concession staff, volunteers or event staff can undermine the accessibility goals of your film festival. Ensure that everyone who will come in contact with your audience is aware of the accessibility options available to film goers and uses inclusive language.
- AODA Customer Service training is available at [AccessForward.ca](https://www.accessforward.ca). Check out training tips at www.ontario.ca/page/how-train-your-staff-accessibility, or watch an interactive training video on “Volunteering and Accessibility” (<http://moresettlement.org/aodaeng2/story.html>)
- If your film festival is committed to inclusion, ensure any vendors that you partner with, including theatres, venue spaces, and caterers, are also committed to accessibility and are trained to provide the same level of customer service and care that you wish your film festival to represent.
- Providing audience members with opportunities for feedback is always helpful for planning future film festivals. Add an additional section for your audience members to comment on accessibility options that were offered. Offer multiple ways to provide feedback.

Dive Deeper Resources

Guides and Toolkits

Planning Accessible Events So Everyone Feels Welcome, Accessibility Directorate of Ontario
<http://www.findmyspark.ca/spark-plug/hosting-accessible-events>

Access Cinema, Film London – Resources and tips on accessible screenings from Film London, London’s screen industries agency
<http://filmlondon.org.uk/film-hub-london/film-hub-resources/access-cinema>

Inclusion in the Creative Workplace and Inclusive HR Toolkit, Work In Culture- Resources on making your workplace or arts organization more accessible and inclusive, including policy examples, best practices, links, resources, and checklists.
<http://www.workinculture.ca/Resources/Inclusion-in-the-Creative-Workplace>
<http://www.workinculture.ca/Resources/Inclusion-in-the-Creative-Workplace/Inclusive-HR-Toolkit>

Clear Print Guidelines, Canadian National Institute for the Blind
<http://www.cnib.ca/en/services/resources/Clearprint/Documents/CNIB%20Clear%20Print%20Guide.pdf>

Arts and Autism – Ohio Resource Guide for Cultural Institutions
https://issuu.com/vsaohio/docs/arts_and_autism_guide_cultural_orga

Technical Resources

Accessibility Clearing House, Federal Communications Commission Information hub about innovative ways to communicate and accessible communication technologies, especially for people who may have a disability. <https://ach.fcc.gov/>

Audio Description for People with Vision Loss, A Guide for Performing Arts Settings, Kennedy Center <http://msradio.huji.ac.il/kennedy%20center%20guide.pdf>

Sensory Friendly Programming, A Guide for Performing Arts Settings, Kennedy Center
<http://education.kennedy-center.org/education/accessibility/lead/SensoryGuidebook.pdf>

Kennedy Center: Technical Tip Sheets, Universal Principles of Online Accessible Ticketing, Radio Frequency, Induction Loop and Infrared Assistive Listening Devices, Captioning/CART in the Performing Arts <https://www.kennedy-center.org/accessibility/>

Deaf Artists and Theatres Toolkit, Cahoots Theatre and Toronto International Deaf Film and Arts Festival Resource and guide to increase innovative collaborations between professional theatre companies and Deaf artists as well as to increase engagement with Deaf audiences. Includes videos and templates. <http://cahoots.ca/datt/>

Ontario Resources

Accessibility Directorate of Ontario - <https://www.ontario.ca/accessibility>

Canadian Hearing Society – Ontario Interpreting Services
<https://www.chs.ca/services/ontario-interpreting-services>

Canadian Hearing Society - Captioning/CART Services
<https://www.chs.ca/services/captioning-services>

Accessible Media Incorporated - <http://www.ami.ca/about-ami/web-and-mobile-accessibility>

ReelAbilities Toronto Film Festival - <http://www.toronto.reelabilities.org/>

ReelAbilities Film Festival International - <http://reelabilities.org/>

Tangled Art + Disability - Disability Arts and Culture - <http://tangledarts.org/>

Access Forward – Free accessibility training for staff, board and volunteers
<http://www.accessforward.ca/>

Picasso Pro - Picasso PRO was formed to facilitate genuine opportunity and integration for artists with disabilities and Deaf artists in the performing and media arts
<https://picassopro.org>

Rendezvous With Madness Film Festival - <http://www.rendezvouswithmadness.ca/>

Toronto International Deaf Film and Arts Festival - <http://tidfaf.ca/>

Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) - <http://www.cnib.ca/>

Independent Living Canada - <http://www.ilcanada.org/en/>

Ce document est également disponible en français

ReelAbilities

 **Ontario**
 An EnAbling Change Project
 with the Government of Ontario

Miles Nadal JCC

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Ryerson University Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

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Community Living Toronto
 Where choices change the lives of people with an intellectual disability

COMMUNITY LIVING Ontario