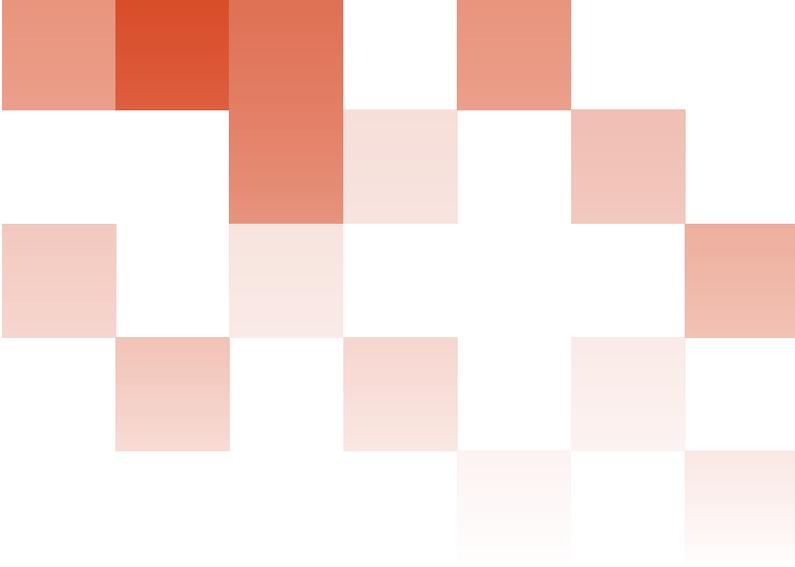


**ACCESSIBILITY
EXCELLENCE
SELF-STUDY
WORKBOOK**





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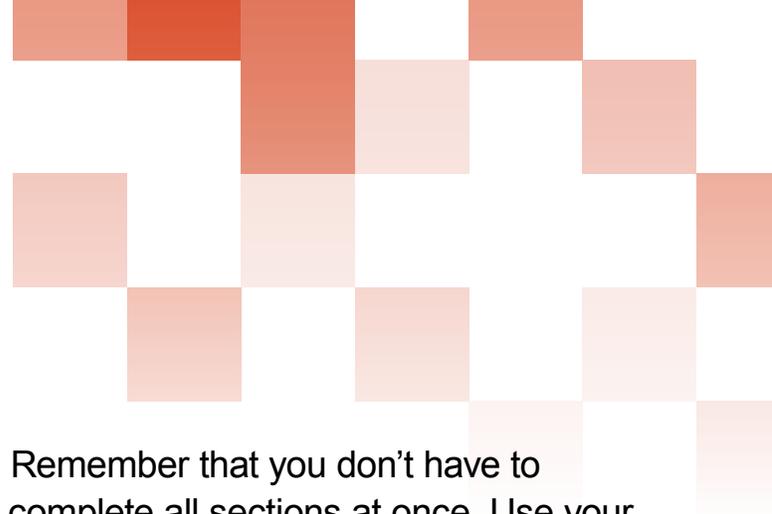


How to Use the Workbook



Old Economy Village (Ambridge, PA)

If you have not reviewed the Implementation Guide already, please look there for our suggested process and preparation steps. This workbook is designed to be used together with the Maturity Model and Resource Guides. While the Maturity Model includes standards that can be applied to any type of organization, the workbook is designed as a deeper dive into some areas. It also expands on concepts introduced in the Maturity Model.



- When we refer to “staff” in this workbook, this can mean paid staff or volunteers, depending on the organization.
- **Each section includes examples** from different types of museums relating to the levels of performance. Some sections include discussion questions or frequently asked questions (FAQs).
- Think about your organization’s specific culture and mindset and what changes may be needed to move forward (please see Implementation Guide for help). Ask yourself this: **Are we doing the best we can within our available resources?**
- Remember that you don’t have to complete all sections at once. Use your experience with the Maturity Model to choose sections that were confusing or where you know you need work.
- Some sections **may not apply** to your specific organization or physical site. You can skip these sections or mark them as N/A (not applicable.)

Foundations and **Big Picture Concept** sections look at broad ideas of DEIA that can apply across multiple areas of an organization. These often can be used to support intersectional work identifying barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities as well as other marginalized communities.

For each section, you can use the “*This looks like*” examples as **discussion prompts or writing exercises**:

- How could the experiences of these visitors or staff members change if they move up or down a level?
- What might this look like at your organization?
- What other information do you need to move forward?
 - Look in the Resource Guides or Glossary if you want more information about something specific.
 - Reach out to find experts, including people with lived experience, to ask questions and discuss your unique organization (see Implementation Guide for suggestions on how to do this).

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Old Economy Village (Ambridge, PA)

Partnerships/Accessibility Advisory Group

Partnership with community members and organizations is essential for successful DEIA work. We recognize the importance of the disability justice stance “nothing about us, without us” as a core value of this project and DEIA work in general.

At the Emerging and Basic levels, partnerships may be more driven by the organization’s needs and act like a transaction. At the Good and Better levels, partnerships should be equal with both organization and community partners benefitting from the exchange and having some say in the early phases of a program or exhibition.

Each performance indicator level shows growth towards more meaningful, equal partnerships:

Emerging

The organization is looking to make partnerships part of its practice and may have experimented with one-time partnerships for specific projects.

This looks like: The organization has reached out to a local school (identified by a board member) to display student artwork in its visitor center over the past summer. It has identified populations with which it would like to partner in the future but unsure about what to do next.

Basic

The organization has some consistent partnerships with community organizations on a transactional basis and occasionally seeks feedback from visitors.

This looks like: The organization has initiated a partnership with the local Center for Independent Living to get recommendations for how to make its programs more accessible. Organization staff have decided to create a series of ASL-interpreted lectures based on this feedback and have asked the CIL to contract interpreters and help market these talks to its Deaf consumers.

Good

Partnerships are happening at a consultation level on a regular basis; the organization has established some regular advisory groups for community input and review.

This looks like: An organization has developed an Accessibility Advisory Council made of local people with different disabilities. The group meets twice a year to discuss programs and exhibitions currently in development, and their feedback is shared with the relevant staff teams.

Better

Partnerships are established, based in mutual respect, and co-creation with partners is an organizational norm.

This looks like: At the beginning of joint projects, the organization works with community partners to define roles and agree on areas of shared authority. These might include identifying collecting priorities, exhibit content, interpretive strategies, and/or educational programs. Members of advisory groups are empowered to spearhead new projects in collaboration with staff. The organization is recognized as a respectful partner within the community and is a target of community members or organizations looking to share proposals for partnership.

Accessibility Coordinator

An accessibility coordinator supports an organization's DEIA work by being responsible for overall accessibility compliance. The appointment of an ADA coordinator is required by any state or local government entity that employs 50 or more employees and all organizations and businesses that receive federal funding. (Examples of places that are required by law to hire an ADA coordinator are the National Park Service, police and fire departments, public transportation companies, and universities.) This does not mean that you need to have an accessibility coordinator at your specific organization—there may be a person whose role is to support accessibility for all state agencies or local government departments.

An accessibility coordinator's roles can include the following:

- Fulfilling the administrative requirements of ADA compliance and handling public complaints of noncompliance.
- Conducting self-evaluations of programmatic barriers in services, developing transition plans if changes are required, and overseeing accessibility improvements. The [Accessibility Audit Site Visit Guide](#) and [Action Planning Template](#) can help you with this as well.
- Handling requests for auxiliary aids and services, providing information about accessible programs and services, and serving as an ADA resource for the organization.

Daniel Boone Homestead (Birdsboro, PA)



Even if your organization is not legally required to have an accessibility coordinator, it can be useful to have one or more staff who are responsible for some or all these roles.

Emerging

The organization does not have any staff whose roles are formally dedicated to accessibility.

Basic

The organization has staff who assist with accessibility initiatives in addition to their main roles.

This looks like: Sam, head of visitor services, is currently acting as the contact person within the organization for accessibility concerns and works with leadership to make decisions about implementation.

Good

The organization is building ADA and accessibility into position descriptions.

This looks like: Jane has the job title “museum educator and ADA coordinator” and her responsibilities include educational work, developing a plan for accessibility improvements in exhibits, and serving as the contact for visitors’ accommodation requests.

Better:

The organization invests in a formal ADA coordinator position or the primary duties of one or more staff include ADA and accessibility.

This looks like: The organization has promoted Jane to full-time ADA coordinator with oversight of the education department; a part-time educator in her department has been made full-time to assume her education program duties.

Think about your organization and its staff, visitors, and structure:

- What are some benefits or challenges that could result from having one person as an ADA Coordinator?
- Would it be useful for your organization to have multiple people sharing these responsibilities?

Previsit Planning

A museum visit begins well before audiences enter the building or site. At the Basic level, any accommodations that the organization offers, including map of accessible paths, parking, and drop-off areas are available on the organization's web presence.

Emerging:

The organization is aware of the importance of planning the visit and that barriers in planning can be barriers to actually visiting the site.

This looks like: Mel, a wheelchair user, goes to a website and doesn't see any information about accessible parking. They choose to visit a different museum instead.

Basic

The museum's web presence includes publicly available information about accessibility. Accessible seating options are offered through the same methods (online and in-person) as for purchasing regular tickets.

This looks like: Larry sees an option for accessible seating when purchasing a ticket for an in-person event. His receipt also includes details for how to request accommodations.

Good

A dedicated accessibility page on the organization's web presence lists information about available accommodations, tools designed to help disabled visitors, and relevant policies.

This looks like: Fatima has PTSD and is the mother of a child on the autism spectrum. She wants to know if her service dog will be welcome at the museum. When she goes to the museum's accessibility page, she finds both a social narrative to use with her child and the museum's current service animal policy.

Better

Multiple methods of communication are available for visitors to communicate with staff, including phone, text message, or live chat during regular business hours.

This looks like: Luis is hard of hearing and has a question about a special program at a historic site. He goes to their website and sees a "Contact Us" page that lists a phone number and an email address for accessibility-specific questions, along with a chat box for general inquiries.

Financial Access

The cost of entry can be a real barrier for visitors.

Emerging

The organization's leadership acknowledges that admission cost can be a barrier for accessibility.

This looks like: Elena, the director of a small historic house is working on the next agenda for a board meeting. She has heard from staff that some visitors have complained about the admission prices being too high and makes a note to include discussing lowering admission prices to meet visitor attendance goals in the next board meeting.

Basic

Low-cost memberships or discounted admission are available for students or people eligible for public assistance programs who present the required ID or documentation.

This looks like: Jay is a student at a local university. They go to the front desk to pay and see a sign that advertises \$2 off general admission with a student ID.

Good

The organization offers free admission for caretakers or companions to visitors with disabilities.

This looks like: Elsa is blind and visiting with her friend Ray, who is acting as her guide. When they go to the admissions desk, the staff member notices Elsa's white cane and mentions that the museum offers free companion admission. Elsa and Ray pay for the cost of one ticket.

Better

Free admission is available for students or people receiving public assistance, without the need to show identification.

This looks like: Fred is not sure if he can afford to visit the museum. He heard from a friend that the museum offers free admission for people on public assistance. Even though Fred is nervous, he is prepared with his SNAP card and goes to the museum admissions desk to ask about the free admission program. The staff say they are glad he asked and tell him that all he needs to do is ask to participate.

NOTEWORTHY

[Access Matters: How Rethinking Low-Cost Memberships Promoted Inclusion and Boosted Visits at the Madison Children's Museum](#) shows an example of how one museum thought critically about financial access and worked to remove poverty shaming as a barrier to entry:

“We were making all these efforts to get people to our door and then having to do the gauntlet of shame with their children once they’re through the door,” said Sandra Bonnici, who is now the museum’s associate director of education, diversity and inclusion. “Even though these programs are designed to eliminate financial barriers, the way we were implementing them was actually in itself a barrier.”

Programmatic Access/ Accommodations

Programmatic access or accommodations are auxiliary aids or services that enable people with disabilities to experience sites, buildings, objects, and programs in ways that replicate, to the greatest degree possible, what people without disabilities experience.

Access Smithsonian offers a number of resource [guides for museum professionals](#) that have more examples of programmatic access, including the [Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition Design](#). More examples and resources about specific techniques and strategies are available in the toolkit [Programs and Interpretation](#) and [Buildings and Grounds](#) Resource Guides. Keep in mind that any accommodations made in general should also be available for other types of visits, such as members-only events or school group tours. Programmatic accommodations can also be virtual—some examples of these are listed in the Virtual Programs section of this workbook.

Emerging

Programmatic alternatives exist, but they do not effectively communicate an equivalent visitor experience.

This looks like: A museum shows foreign-language films with English subtitles as part of an evening series. Mary, who is Deaf, is confused when she sees everyone laughing partway through the film. She asks a hearing friend next to her to explain and finds out that the film had a joke where people started speaking using each other's voices while discordant music played in the background. Mary writes a letter to the museum and explains that showing the film with open captions that described sounds in addition to dialogue and narration could have improved her experience.

Basic

Large-print or audio versions of gallery labels are available and Braille versions can be requested with advance notice.

This looks like: Caridad is having trouble reading the exhibit text in a crowded gallery. She asks a security guard if there is another option available. The security guard guides her to the ticket desk, where she borrows a large-print copy of the exhibit text. The large print copy also includes a transcript of a video on display.

Good

Tactile interpretive elements are supported by written or spoken description.

This looks like: Rashad is visiting a farm museum and has been invited to touch some of the equipment as part of a group tour. As Rashad is exploring an antique tractor, the volunteer tour guide helps him navigate around it and uses visual description skills to highlight details of the tractor and answer Rashad's questions.

Better

Multiple accommodations are readily available at events, and accommodations are flexible depending on visitor preferences and situation.

This looks like: Lauren and Ben are a Deaf couple who are both members of a historic house's friends group. Ben attends the monthly ASL-interpreted tours with his friends. Lauren prefers to visit the house on her own since she knows the videos have open captions and attends regular members-only lectures with live CART service.

Universal/Inclusive Design (International Symbol of Accessibility, and Seating)

Universal design is a framework for the design of places, things, information, communication, and policy that focuses on the user, on the widest range of people operating in the widest range of situations without special or separate design. Automatic doors are an example of universal design, as are curb cuts on a street that give access to wheelchair users, people with strollers, or delivery drivers unloading a heavy package with a dolly.

Inclusive or human-centered design takes the ideas behind universal design further and allows for more flexibility and a user-driven experience. We share some examples of universal and inclusive design in our [Buildings and Grounds Resource Guide](#).



Carnegie Science Center (Pittsburgh, PA)



Westmoreland Museum of Art (Greensburg, PA)

Basic

Wayfinding signage to restrooms or other basic amenities is well-lit and features high contrast between lettering and background. Seating is readily available in some areas.

This looks like: A large sign beside an admissions desk that says, “Accessibility Resources” in bold white text on a red background above a bulleted list showing “manual wheelchairs, magnifying glasses with flashlights, portable stools, noise-cancelling headphones, weighted vests, and sensory backpacks.” To the left of the sign and behind the desk, there is a gray-painted open area that features a large red poster with a white arrow pointing diagonally upwards and to the right. Bold white text reads: “Exhibit Galleries. Admission Wristband Required. No open food or drink.”



Pennsbury Manor (Morrisville, PA)

Good

Any modifications to galleries have been designed with the needs of a diverse audience in mind, including those with disabilities.

This looks like: A garden at a historic site features a multisensory area highlighting plants with distinctive scents and textures, permanent benches every 30 feet around the edge, and options for large-print and audio guides available at the entrance.

Better

All building pathways, entrances, and interpretive elements have been designed to promote ease of use and an inclusive experience for all visitors.

This looks like: An art museum makes its building feel more approachable by using gentle ramps surrounded by flowers and long grasses as the route to its main entrance.

Outreach



Erie Maritime Museum (Erie, PA)

Communications/Marketing Materials

In general, we recommend using [person-first language](#) (for example, “a person with a disability” or “Joe uses a wheelchair”), unless referring to a person or community who self-identifies differently. In that case, use the language they prefer (for example, “Janet is autistic” or “in Deaf culture”).

When selecting images for promotional use, make sure these are accessible using alt-text or descriptions. More information about accessible social media and promotional materials can be found in the [Accessible Communication Guide](#).

Emerging

The organization is aware it has improvements to make. To help during improvements, they have a clear process for people to leave messages and submit requests for accommodations. The organization follows through and returns messages in a timely manner.

Basic

Marketing/PR/outreach staff is familiar with accessibility accommodations available and any barriers at the site. Accessible features, such as image alt-text, and available accommodations are included in communications. Promotional materials reflect a diverse array of humanity, across culture, ability, and experience.

This looks like: Merrill the educator checked in with the outreach committee before posting a summer camp schedule for next season. The committee set up a meeting with their accessibility advisors to look at and offer suggestions on the post and where to send it. Merrill was able to partner with a local teacher with special education certification to adapt or replace activities so that all the kids could participate through the whole camp. The team also created a “Know Before You Go” document with images to support parents who need to prepare their kids to do new things.

Good

Marketing/PR/outreach staff consult with representatives from local cultural and disability communities to broaden the spread of communications and ensure accurate communications in languages other than English.

This looks like: As the outreach coordinator, Mitzi spends regular time during the week to communicate with diverse communities in her area. She blocks time specifically to keep in touch with current partners, past partners, and for outreach to potential partners. She works with her local community center to find minigrants to pay for translators and printing costs for three of the languages that are spoken in the region.

Better

Messaging to staff and visitors emphasizes that the safety of visitors is weighted equally with the security of collections. All communications use inclusive language.

This looks like: Hope is the director of the local interfaith leadership group and worked with the outreach team of the museum to gather feedback on why partnerships with the museum seem to not last. Many people in the community felt that the museum was intimidating. Hope worked with the outreach team to rewrite sections of the programs to ask more questions and leave more time to explore different perspectives. The museum shifted some of its funds to support both customer service and safety training for the museum’s room attendants.

WCAG Standards/Accessibility in Web Presence

The [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\)](#) are designed by the [World Wide Web Consortium \(W3C\)](#). W3C is an international group of people working to create common web accessibility standards for people with disabilities. Note that the standards are updated and reviewed regularly. Revisit the standards before starting new digital and web projects. W3C standards are the most widely accepted to meet ADA requirements. [The acronym POUR helps us remember to make the web perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust.](#)

Emerging

The organization is aware that their digital and web presence should be accessible and are making changes as they learn new things.

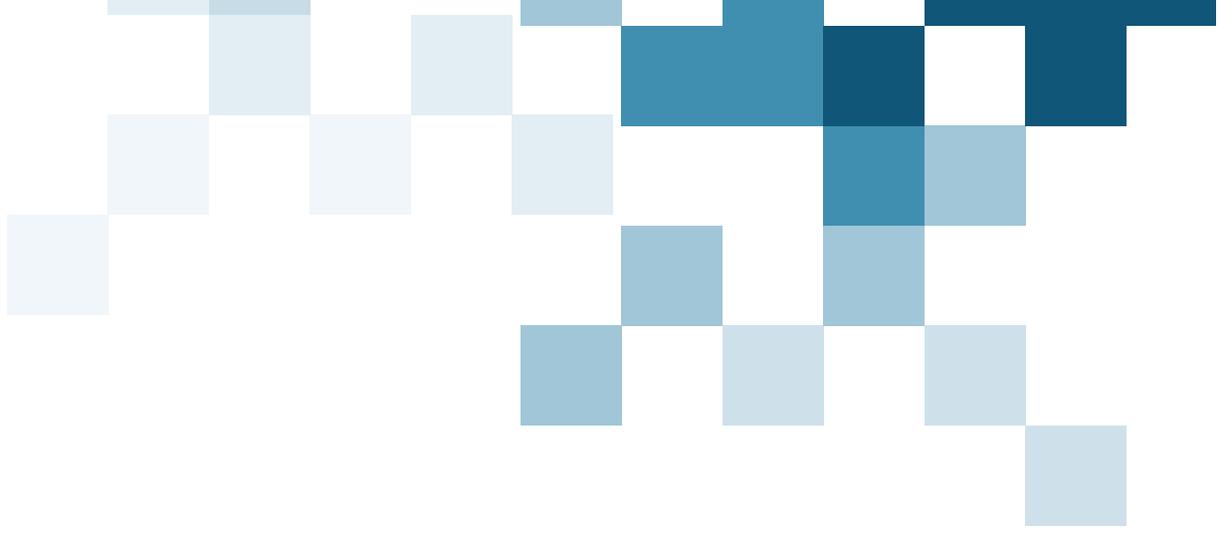
This looks like: Morgan volunteers to manage the website. They increased the font size and tried to make new or replacement pages more readable for low vision users. Morgan also added the museum customer service contact information just in case anyone needs help.

Basic

The organization invests staff time and has a budget line to improve and maintain their web presence following WCAG 2.1 standards. They have made key changes in their digital content and have a clear, budgeted plan to improve the rest of their web presence.

This looks like: Abena, a part-time museum manager, uses an automated accessibility plug-in to check if the historic house website is set-up properly. She also tests the site herself using her browser's screen reader and keyboard-only navigation to make sure she did not miss anything and refers regularly to the WCAG 2.1 standards.

Ken, the lead docent, helps Abena by adding alt-text to images on the website and social media. Ken pulls together the available accommodations and contact information and updates them on the Visit Us page as needed.



Good

The organization partners with accessibility user-experts, the people who depend on digital and web accessibility, to develop and improve their content.

This looks like: The accessibility and web design committees worked together to create an accessible template for their arboretum’s new website based on WCAG 2.1 standards. They agreed to pay for user testing. Kiki, the development manager, applied for a grant to help pay for a web testing company that pays for users with disabilities to test pages and provide feedback.

Better

Digital and web accessibility users are a part of multiple stages of the planning and creation of the organization’s digital and web presence.

This looks like: The museum director pulled together a team of staff and advisors to revamp the art museum’s web presence. They planned a pre-evaluation from a local center for people with disabilities who agreed to participate in a survey. The staff and advisors took time to review results and ask more questions before designing a new website.

Miko, the office manager, committed to learn and maintain his knowledge of WCAG 2.1 AAA standards and helped draft a web presence policy for the museum.

Visitor Feedback/Audience Research

Emerging:

The organization has a general awareness of audience and community needs and has plans in place to meet specific needs. Audience feedback is collected informally through anecdotal comments and observations and is reviewed by governing authority, staff, and volunteers.

Basic

The organization offers follow-up surveys and evaluation after programs and events on a cyclical basis. The organization asks for feedback on accessibility issues from a range of people, including people with disabilities.

This looks like: Bjorn is the evaluation specialist at a history center. He is responsible for creating and distributing surveys for all the museum's programs and includes a question asking visitors if they experienced any accessibility challenges in each survey.

Good

The evaluation process is embedded in accessible planning for programs and events from the planning stages and in annual reviews of audience outreach. The organization creates multiple ways to submit information so that feedback is more equitable.

This looks like: Sandy is the programs manager at a textile museum. Past program comments show that people with disabilities want a craft demonstration by someone who uses adaptive technology. Sandy invites Bert who crochets and has dexterity issues from a past injury. Bert will use his large grip hooks and a sewing clamp to show how to crochet a granny square from a 1920s pattern. The visitors get their choice of a standard or adaptive granny square kit for the program. Sandy invites the visitors to give feedback on the program with options to give immediate personal feedback or to fill out a survey online.

Better

Audience research is reflected in programming, exhibitions, and collections. The evaluation process itself has been designed to be inclusive and follow the principles of universal design.

This looks like: Brandy is excited to visit the new STEAM program at a science museum. She was tired of waiting to participate in programs when the gallery offered Autism Days. The museum now has staff trained in disabilities on all shifts if she asks for support. The museum also has sensory backpacks and headsets she can borrow.

Big Picture Concept: ADA Standards and Public Accommodation

Museums, historic sites, and cultural organizations are all places of public accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Because they are open to the public, they should not discriminate against people with disabilities. The [ADA National Network](#) and [regional ADA centers](#) are experts in this field and offer many resources to answer specific questions. Please note that the Accessibility Excellence Maturity Model and workbook put ADA compliance at the Basic level and encourage organizations to exceed ADA standards wherever possible.

ADA Frequently Asked Questions:

- My organization is located in a historic building. Does the ADA still apply?
 - The ADA defines “qualified historic properties” as those [eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places](#), or designated as historic under a state or local law. There is no grandfather clause to the ADA and historic places are not exempt. The ADA does recognize the unique needs of historic structures, and there are many places to go for support and information.
 - The [Buildings and Grounds Guide](#) offers some useful resources for making historic buildings and grounds more accessible.
 - Programmatic accommodations are also a great way to think about adding in accessibility for some visitors without making major changes to a building or landscape.
- What’s the difference between **Title II and Title III**? What about **Section 504**? How do I know which one applies to my organization?
 - Section 504 bans discrimination on the basis of disability by recipients of federal funds.
 - Title II applies to state and local governments. It has stricter administrative requirements, including an ADA coordinator, self-evaluation, transition plan, grievance procedure, and public notice.

- Title III applies to the private sector and can include museums or cultural organizations that are operated as 501(c)3 nonprofits.
- I've heard there are exceptions for an “**undue burden**” on an organization and that the ADA only requires “**readily achievable**” accommodations. What does this mean?
 - These standards only apply to Title III and are designed to balance an organization's financial and staff capacity with its requirement to be accessible. This is not a free pass for organizations with small budgets and limited staff, but it does offer some flexibility in how to meet ADA standards. The ADA National Network has information on [tax incentives](#) available to support accessibility improvements in small organizations.

[Of Consuming Interest: A Guide to Titles II & III of the ADA for People with Vision Loss](#)

is a document created by the American Foundation for the Blind that offers a deep dive on different aspects of the ADA. Although it focuses on people who are blind or have low vision, the early sections provide a good explanation of basic ADA concepts and definitions. Later sections list specific examples. Think about how the examples listed can apply to different disabilities and in your organization.

Transportation Access

For people with disabilities, transportation can be a major barrier to access goods and services. Some public transit agencies offer services designed specifically for people with disabilities and older adults, like shared-ride programs that operate in areas that are not typically served by public transportation. Providing access to your organization via public transportation, if possible, is also a good way to lower the financial barrier for entry to people who may not own or drive a car.

Emerging

The organization is working to improve available transportation and accessible parking options

This looks like: Hana, a visitor services associate at a rural history museum, is researching shared-ride services in her county.

Basic

The organization's web presence references public transportation options, if available.

Good

If in an area served by public transportation, directional signage to the organization's accessible entrance is provided as near to the closest stop as possible.



Children's Museum of Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh, PA)

by public transportation

PAT bus route 54C stops near the Children's Museum.

The Children's Museum is just a short walk from the North Side Station on Port Authority's light rail system, aka the T.

For all public transportation options, visit the [Port Authority website](#).

Better

The organization advocates for improved local public transit to its site, including building and/or improving accessible routes.

This looks like: Gina, the marketing director at a small art museum, regularly attends local community listening sessions run by her state's Department of Transportation to advocate for adding a bus stop closer to the museum.

Designated Accessible Entrance

Museum wayfinding signage



QLine
(light rail)
transit stop

Detroit Institute of Arts, Farnsworth St. entrance (source: Google Maps)

Parking (Public Parking Only or Paid-Access Lot)

Like transportation, parking costs and/or lack of a designated lot can also be a barrier for access.



Basic

If an organization does not have a lot designated for visitor parking, adequate accessible public parking is located near the designated accessible entrance.



Good

If visitors must pay for parking, the organization provides free or reduced-cost parking as a benefit to certain communities (members, partner organizations).

This looks like: A history museum in a large city shares a small lot with a neighboring business and offers free parking in that lot for visitors participating in focus groups, some special programs, or staff use on weekends.



Better

Parking is free for all visitors and staff.

Dining Areas/Water Fountains

If your organization provides visitor comforts serving food or drink, like a café, water fountains, or restaurant, these all need to meet [ADA Standards for Accessible Design](#) for your organization to meet the Basic level.

Look to the [ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities](#) and make sure to include these areas on an [Accessibility Audit](#). If you have a restaurant or café onsite, having lunch there as part of the day for your [User-Expert Site Visit](#) can provide useful, real-time feedback.

Recreational Areas

If your organization includes recreational areas like a parks, play areas, picnic areas, or trails, it is important to make them accessible to all visitors and staff. The ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities has some specific [Checklists for Recreational Areas](#) that can be helpful for these specific situations. At an Emerging level, recreational areas should be clean and well-maintained. At a Better level, landscapes might incorporate universal design elements that align with the organization's mission.

Safety and Security

The safety and security of all guests are a primary part of the visitor experience. The [ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities](#) and [Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition Design](#) include some examples of accessible safety features. When going through an [Accessibility Audit](#), be sure to think about emergency procedures and prioritize any changes that risk visitor safety in your Action Plan.

Here are some recommendations for organizations at the Basic level:

- Develop inclusive evacuation procedures that include accessible routes for visitors with mobility issues and supplements to emergency announcements for visitors who are Deaf or hard of hearing.
- Train security or maintenance staff in basic etiquette for sighted guides to help visitors who are blind or low vision to evacuate safely.
- Make sure your fire detection and suppression systems provide both visual and audible warnings.
- Keep first aid kits and automated external defibrillators (AEDs) at physically accessible locations like entrances and train visitor contact staff how to use them in an emergency.

**What does this look like in your organization?
How might you move forward to the next level?**

Core Visitor Experience



Landis Valley Village & Farm Museum (Lancaster, PA)

Not all visitor experiences look the same, but it is important that all experiences are accessible. As you are going through this workbook, think about what your core visitor experience looks like:

- Does my organization have only **one core** visitor experience?
 - *For example*, a historic house that is only open through appointment for a guided tour.
- Does my organization have **multiple ways** of engaging visitors?
 - *For example*, a museum and park complex that is open to visitors for a self-guided visit but also offers guided tours twice a day and is in a state park that is open to visitors for recreational use.
- Does my organization's visitor experience include **special events** and/or **virtual programs**?

Sensory-Friendly Spaces

Museums can be places of engagement and creativity, but this environment can also be overwhelming for some people. Sensory needs vary a lot. It doesn't matter if the sensitivity is temporary or a permanent part of a person's life. Consider signs, quiet spaces, supportive staff, and special programs.

Emerging

The organization participates in awareness days and sometimes a group arranges a sensory-friendly tour.

Basic

A sensory-friendly organization provides choices in advance of and during a visit. Signs give visitors a path to skip sections of a tour if they feel they would be overwhelming.

This looks like: A family visiting from out of town came on a week without a sensory tour. The docent, Betty, offers to guide the family through the museum and help them navigate away from a bright flashing exhibit and show them a quiet space where they can sit if they need to take a break.

Good

The organization loans equipment to visitors to help accommodate them with sensory sensitivities.

This looks like: The Children's Museum of Richmond offers a [peek inside their sensory backpacks](#) that are available to visitors upon request. These were developed in partnership with an occupational therapist and offer noise-cancelling headphones, fidget cubes, and a weighted vest.

Better

The organization has a dedicated, permanent sensory-friendly/calming/quiet room.

This looks like: A quiet room that includes sensory-friendly amenities (noise-canceling headphones, dimmable lights, fidget toys). This room is clearly marked on maps and available during public hours and special events.

This looks like: A smaller organization or a special event is prepared with spaces that can temporarily be used for visitors for sensory purposes or private spaces for nursing mothers.

Fragrance-Free Environment

Often smells are used in a museum setting to enhance visitors' interpretive experience, like fresh-baked bread or the scent of oil and grease from a train engine. But for visitors with chemical sensitivities, something as small as a tour guide's strong perfume can trigger a migraine or allergic reaction and ruin their visit.

Some organizations have adopted policies for a "fragrance-free environment" in their offices by using low-odor cleaning products and asking staff to limit use of scented personal care products. If your visitor experience includes some strong fragrances as part of a program or the visitor experience (for example, cooking demonstrations in a living history program), it can be helpful to mark these areas in maps or provide alternate pathways so that visitors can avoid or minimize strong smells if they choose.

Map Improvements/Accessible Maps

Maps are a key part of how visitors experience a new place. Having maps available in different, accessible formats can help make a visit more welcoming from the beginning.



Basic

Maps that include accessible paths and restrooms are available at the site and online.



Good

Service animal relief areas are listed on the organization's map.



Better

Maps are available in alternate formats for a variety of needs.

This looks like: A small nature center has developed a tactile map of its site using a scale model constructed as an Eagle Scout project. They also have maps available in large print and include a map on their website that shows areas with bright lights or loud noises.

Equipment Loans

One good practice is to offer accessibility equipment like wheelchairs, mobility scooters, or assistive listening devices for loan at the ticketing desk. If the site has accessibility equipment available for loan, the equipment is clean and in good working order.

Exhibits

[Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition Design](#) includes good advice for creating accessible exhibits in the design phase or for reviewing exhibit spaces in detail during an [Accessibility Audit](#). Using the Cross-Disability Guide when evaluating or designing new exhibits can help museum staff better understand some of the needs of people with disabilities. Conducting a [User-Expert Site Visit](#) is another useful tool for getting firsthand feedback on what is working (or not working) for visitors in exhibits.

At the least, aim to provide programmatic accommodations in exhibits to effectively communicate their core visitor outcomes to people with disabilities. The best possible option for accessibility in exhibits is using inclusive design to allow people to easily customize their most accessible visitor experience, as seen in [4 Ways the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum Prioritized Accessibility](#).

Using people with visual disabilities as an example, here are some **Good level** practices for making exhibits accessible:

- All exhibit text is well lit and features high contrast between lettering and background.
- Magnifying devices are integrated into cases, and tactile or multisensory elements are provided to enhance object display.
- Visitors are invited to touch some objects on display, or objects are used in programs, to demonstrate their original function.
 - When collections objects cannot be touched, visual description is provided by staff or audio guide.
- Tactile models of the building(s)/site are available for visitor use and building models are made of the same materials as the original.

Taking things up to **Better-level** practices might look like this:

- Tactile models are built to scale and include both broad and detailed elements (for example, scale model of a large sculpture or building provided alongside a full-size touchable detail).
- Visitors may explore parts of historic buildings through touch if their condition permits.

Collections Access

The heart of the mission of cultural organizations usually revolves around its collections, whether permanent or on loan. A sustainable collection is one that the public and researchers can access in exhibits, presentations, collections research, and as intellectual material included in outside scholarship and creativity. Collections were once private and exclusive. Today, it is expected that collections are to be protected and made accessible for the greater good of everyone.

Emerging

The organization provides virtual access to its collections. Staff are aware it is important to make areas in historic buildings accessible to people with physical disabilities. The organization understands the need to increase digital access to its researchers and visitors.

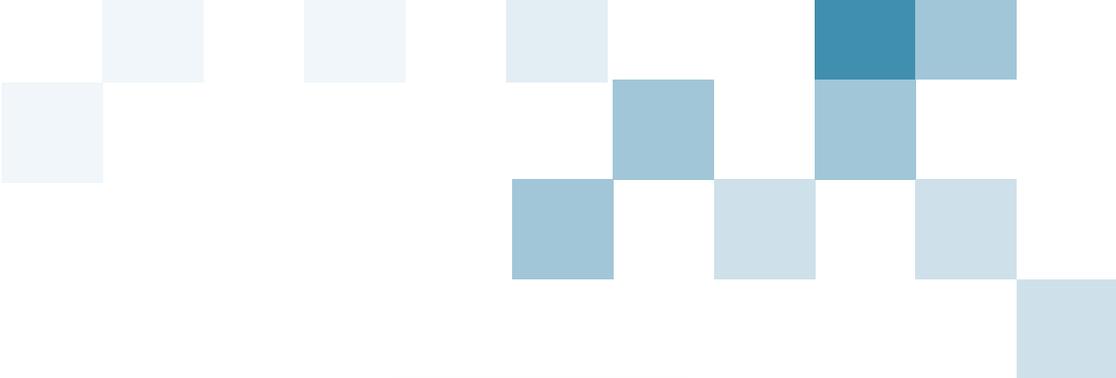
This looks like: Wendell, the reference librarian, keeps the magnifying sheets clean and the paths clear in the narrow reading room of an old historic house museum. He has volunteers working on scanning the collections and some local college students transcribing some of the documents, such as old script letters, that the scanner is unable to process. The library staff is training to make the research materials accessible.

Basic

Staff provides digital access through high-resolution photographs, description of objects, and transcription that is shared in person and through its web presence. The organization works with staff to make storage areas in historic buildings accessible to people with physical disabilities.

This looks like: Curator Tilly faithfully posts an accessible finding aid for each collection on the museum website. She also makes sure that researchers know to give her advance notice if they need accommodations and follows through with transcriptions, description, and answering questions.

This looks like: Archivist Taylor uses a mechanical lift to get to higher shelves because of a physical limitation that makes stairs a risk. The shelves are high because the old town hall the museum uses has limited floor space. Taylor places the boxes next to her on the lift and transfers the boxes to a cart that she takes to the researchers.



Good

The organization provides access to archives or behind-the-scenes historic spaces for the public or researchers. The staff also provides virtual access to collections finding aids and current and past exhibits. Newly uploaded images are identified in alt-text and described. A digital improvement plan is in place.

This looks like: Orpheus is a 15-year volunteer who loves providing the white glove experience to researchers and visitors. He makes sure paths stay clear and good signage is available in storage areas. He also regularly checks that temporary ramps are stable and clear of debris in a historic farmhouse.

This looks like: Web finding aids are screen reader friendly and clear descriptions are listed with each object. Images include alt-text. A plan is in place to increase digital access to older and less used collections.

Better

All virtual collections pages with photographs also include written image descriptions or alt-text. The plan to increase digital access is embedded in the regular assignments of the archival and curatorial staff.

This looks like: Curator Erisa completed a project making the top collections of her genealogical society available on the web. The collections were photographed, scanned, described, and transcribed. A sample of the collection and a complete finding aid is posted online and is screen reader friendly.

This looks like: Museum director Tina actively refers to the plan for digital access to prepare staff and volunteer assignments to bring more collections into the organization's web presence.

Special Events and Programs



Cornwall Iron Furnace (Lebanon, PA)

Special Events

Special events should be as accessible as your core visitor experience. The same goes for developing special events only for people with disabilities. If you do special tours for people who are blind or offer sensory-friendly hours, but the permanent collection is not fully accessible, think about how you can make your collections more accessible.

Think about how some practices outlined here can also be applied to virtual experiences. Sometimes the same practices used in an in-person program can also be used virtually.

Emerging

The organization is aware that it should include physical and programmatic accessibility for its programs and special events.

This looks like: Gerald is the programming coordinator at a science museum. He has heard some complaints from visitors that they have trouble hearing the speaker at lectures. Gerald begins researching how to better serve these visitors and learns that providing a microphone and ensuring that speakers use it is a good first step.

A horizontal bar with a pink-to-purple gradient, centered with the word "Basic" in white text.

Basic

Accommodations are available upon request for special programs, or the museum has developed special programs specifically for people with disabilities.

This looks like: Toma is autistic and wants to visit the museum. They are excited to see an option for sensory-friendly hours available but is only able to attend a few of these because their work schedule.

Shakira is hard of hearing and wants to attend an art museum's online lecture series. She goes to register and sees that CART services are offered but must be requested two weeks in advance.

A horizontal bar with a blue-to-teal gradient, centered with the word "Good" in white text.

Good

All phases of program and event planning and implementation include considerations for accessibility.

This looks like: Lina is an educator at an art museum who uses a wheelchair. She works with the museum's public programming staff on their series of puppet performances to make sure that the theater is accessible and helps test to make sure the wheelchair seating area has a full view of the action.

A horizontal bar with a dark blue-to-black gradient, centered with the word "Better" in white text.

Better

Multiple accommodations are readily available at special events and programs.

This looks like: Tilo is the facilities manager at a farm museum and acts as the lead coordinator of their annual garden fair event. He provides extra accessible spaces in the lot and develops a large-print version of the vendor map.

Vera is the accessibility coordinator at a natural history museum. She works to make sure all virtual programs include ASL interpretation and CART captioning and is working to add audio description to the services provided.

Virtual Experiences

Emerging

Programmatic accommodations are implemented in recorded versions of special events and programs.

This looks like: A state history agency develops a series of virtual programs that are recorded using Zoom. Amy, a museum educator, edits the Zoom or YouTube auto-generated subtitles before the video is uploaded to the agency's YouTube page.

Basic

Staff consider multiple audience needs when using virtual program platforms.

This looks like: Rajiv is the programming coordinator at a science museum researching platforms for the museum to use for its new series of virtual programs. He wants to make sure the platform they choose includes keyboard navigation, auto-generated live captions, and the ability to pin a presenter for ASL interpretation.

Good

Special events and programs include a person to assist with technical support for participants.

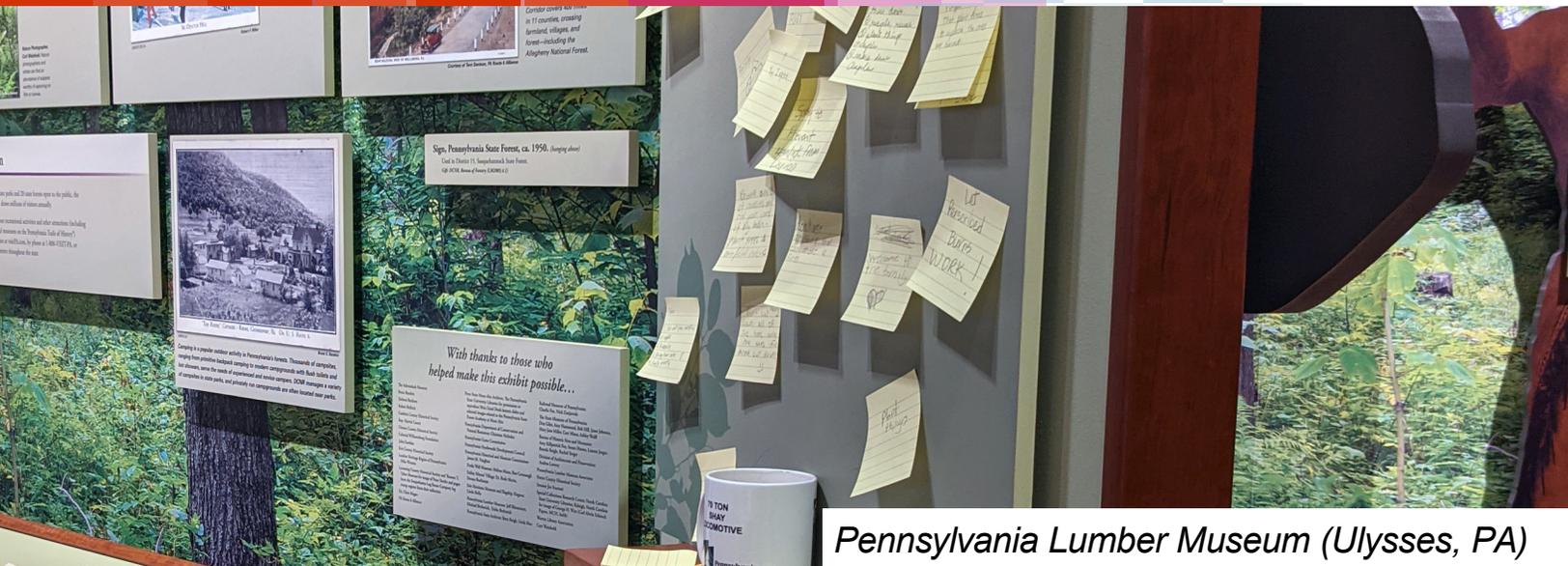
This looks like: Isabella is a volunteer at a nature center. As part of all virtual programs, she explains how to use the captioning feature and pin the ASL interpreter. She also monitors the chat for guests experiencing technical issues and helps them troubleshoot any issues that arise.

Better

Programs include options for engagement before, after, and/or during the program.

This looks like: Conn is participating in an art museum's virtual art-making program. The program includes pre-workshop handouts explaining the project and the types of materials needed. As a congenital hand amputee, Conn is not able to finish his artwork by the end of the program time, but the facilitators have included a hashtag to share finished artwork on social media. After finishing his work, Conn photographs it and shares it using the hashtag. The next week, Conn sees his work featured on the museum's Instagram page.

Interpretive Process and Methodology



Pennsylvania Lumber Museum (Ulysses, PA)

Museum interpretation takes many forms and uses a wide variety of techniques, but it is generally focused on connecting ideas with tangible objects, spaces, and landscapes. Interpretive planning helps museum staff organize, document, and evaluate their chosen themes and methods, while identifying desired changes to make interpretation more inclusive or relevant to visitor interests. The [Programs and Interpretation Guide](#) includes sources for inclusive interpretation, and the [Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition Design](#) provides specifics for exhibit interpretation. You may also want to consult resources from the National Association for Interpretation and the American Association for State and Local History's technical leaflet series.

Emerging

The organization has created informal guidelines that assign key interpretive themes to specific indoor and outdoor spaces. These guidelines reflect an awareness that multiple perspectives provide a more accurate representation of collections and offer more inclusive experiences for audiences.

This looks like: Camille, director/curator at a small art museum, works with docents to identify themes found in the paintings in the 19th-century gallery. They also discuss whose perspectives are reflected in the paintings and whose are missing. They record the themes and perspectives using a simple Word table that they can edit as needed and use for training new guides and developing supplemental education materials.



Basic

The organization's interpretation includes diverse and varied perspectives, including its current and historical communities.

This looks like: As part of a class for interpreters that includes a lecture on a group of 18th-century immigrants to a local community, museum educator Michael invites the staff of a local refugee resettlement agency to shed light on the current immigration picture in the community.



Good

The organization's interpretation plan considers different types of learners and includes strategies for written, spoken, and visual communication. Staff consult the plan when designing exhibits and other spaces and make sure to include tactile components and/or multisensory experiences.

This looks like: At the first meeting for a project to refresh a natural history museum's dioramas, team leader Greta starts with a review of the museum's interpretation plan, which notes that the existing dioramas are text-heavy and lack context. The team's new plans add touchable panels with simulated animal skin and fur, color-coded maps to show habitat and migration, and an audio option for narration of exhibit panels that adds animal sounds.



Better

If languages other than English are used for interpretation, native speakers/users (preferably from local communities) have been consulted to translate and/or review.

This looks like: In need of Spanish translations for his history museum's cellphone tour stops, Gregg contacts Sofia, the coordinator of the local school district's program for adults working on English language proficiency. Sofia identifies several native Spanish speakers who are instructors in the program. Gregg contracts with Jorge to translate and record new audio stops to add to the tour.

Core Documents and Policies

Core documents (mission statements, vision statements, and core values) and policies are the backbone of any cultural organization. If the organization values inclusion and accessibility, it should be reflected in these documents. Although a DEIA policy is not in itself a core document, it should connect to the mission and vision to be effective.

Core Documents



Basic

The mission and vision statements are publicly available in a variety of formats, including digitally.

This looks like: An art museum posts its mission statement on the front page of its website. It also includes its vision statement and core values on its About Us page and in annual reports.



Good

The organization's mission and vision statements are aligned with its DEIA policy as well as industry best practices on diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion.

This looks like: A state museum's DEIA policy focuses on broadening the collection of museum artifacts to better represent all current residents of the state.



Better

The mission and vision statements are used to evaluate priority projects for the organization, including DEIA projects.

This looks like: A state history agency has a DEIA goal to make its sites and content accessible, both physically and virtually. It works toward this goal by working with its member sites to develop a series of online webinars that present each site's most iconic program in a virtual format.

Organizational Policies



Emerging

The organization has policies in place to protect staff and volunteers.

This looks like: A performing arts organization has written policies on antidiscrimination and antiharassment, ethics, whistleblowing, and conflicts of interest. These policies are enforced by its governing authority.



Basic

Policies and procedures of the organization are communicated in sufficient languages to be understandable by all members of the organization's staff, volunteers, and visitors.

This looks like: An art museum polls its staff, volunteers, and visitors annually to determine their primary languages. It then contracts translators to make sure its policies and staff handbook are available in the languages that all staff and at least 20 percent of its visitors use.



Good

The dress code policy takes into consideration the needs of various cultural norms.

This looks like: Jihan is required to wear a uniform of a polo shirt and khakis as a visitor services representative at a nature museum. She wears hijab for religious reasons, and the museum's dress code allows for her to wear this as an addition to her uniform.



Better

All policies have been evaluated for bias.

This looks like: Teri is a board member on a small history museum. As a former high school principal and social studies teacher, she has experience and a personal interest in evaluating writing for bias. She is part of the board's ethics committee and reviews and edits the museum's policies for bias every two years.

Collections Policies

An organization can only be as relevant as its collections. Collections policies should ensure the artifacts in an organization's collection are constantly evolving and reflect the multiple histories of its communities.



Emerging

The organization is aware of gaps in its research and collections and the need to acquire information and items that better reflect diverse histories, stories, and perspectives.

This looks like: An art museum has made a stated commitment to collect more works by Black artists.



Basic

The organization engages in collections assessment at least annually to reveal biases and identify gaps in the collection.

This looks like: Lyudmila, an archivist at a state-owned historic site, is part of a cross-agency team working on an annual collections assessment and is responsible for identifying next steps to address biases and gaps in its collection.



Good

Multiple communities are consulted and offer input annually regarding the collections policy.

This looks like: A natural history museum is revising its collections policy to include repatriating its collections of Indigenous remains and artifacts. It has developed a [Native American Graves Protection and Reparation Act \(NAGPRA\)](#) advisory group made up of members of all federally recognized tribes in its state and consults regularly with staff at the [National Museum of the American Indian](#) about museum best practices.



Better

The collections policy provides methods of filling identified gaps to provide a more diverse approach and reflect multiple communities.

This looks like: A science museum has used a series of programs that facilitate community conversations around bias in its collections to identify areas for deaccessioning and acquiring new artifacts.

Governing Authority

An organization is only as functional as its governing authority. Although there can be different types of governing authorities depending on the organization (for example, a state commission, associates/friends group, and/or a nonprofit board), these should all work for the benefit of the organization and its goals. Depending on the type of governing authority an organization is under, some of these goals may be outside the control of its governing authority, particularly where these members are appointed by an outside agent (like a state museum commission that includes appointed state representatives).

Composition

Regardless of governing authority type, here are some good practices that support accessibility and inclusion:

- Meaningful term limitations for governing authority members
- Plain language in the bylaws
- Regular review of policies and bylaws for bias that includes input from staff and volunteers
- Flexibility for creating committees in response to community needs, programs, and mission.

It is important that your board represent your local community. The examples below show one museum moving through the levels on board representation and diversity.

Emerging

The organization acknowledges that governing authority diversity contributes to its overall inclusivity.

This looks like: Barry, the board president at a transit museum, has drafted a resolution to present at his next board meeting to improve the diversity of the board when addressing upcoming vacancies.

A horizontal bar with a pink-to-purple gradient, centered with the word "Basic".

Basic

The organization has established goals regarding governing authority diversity that contribute to its overall inclusivity.

This looks like: After some research, the transit museum's board identified two areas of preference for new board members for four upcoming vacancies: In a community that identified as 40 percent Black, 20 percent Hispanic or Latinx, and 5 percent Asian, their current board members identified as entirely white with 40 percent women and two people who also identified as LGBTQ. Members also expressed an interest in recruiting someone with a disability to the board. At its next meeting, the board discusses and passes goals aiming to recruit at least one member with a disability and three members from racial and cultural groups currently lacking in representation.

A horizontal bar with a blue-to-teal gradient, centered with the word "Good".

Good

New perspectives, ideas, and concepts are consistently brought to bear on governance issues.

This looks like: Emmalyn, a board member, overheard some staff members discussing frustrations with the museum's outdated core values. Emmalyn asks them for their feedback and presents this to the board in their next meeting.

A horizontal bar with a dark blue-to-black gradient, centered with the word "Better".

Better

The governing authority's membership includes representatives from all the communities it aims to serve, and these members are meaningfully engaged in governing authority work.

This looks like: To serve their board the transit museum has recruited Theo, a Black retired railroad engineer; Tyasha; a Black banker; Sylva, who is autistic and the Community Resources Coordinator for the local Center for Independent Living; and Mariko, a Japanese-American retired teacher. Tyasha serves on the Finance Committee and Sylva serves on the Outreach Committee. Theo and Mariko have asked not to serve on any committees at present but have been active in fundraising for the museum's new exhibit.

Executive Director: Hiring, Overseeing, Evaluating

Emerging

The governing authority reviews the performance of the lead staff member annually.

This looks like: Elwin is the director of a small historical society with an all-volunteer staff. Before the final meeting of the year, the board president meets with Elwin to discuss his performance, including feedback collected from all board members.

Basic

The governing authority has provided adequate resources for the training of the executive director/manager related to DEIA.

This looks like: Kaiti, the director of a historic site within a state agency, attends quarterly trainings on microaggressions and cultural competency offered by her state's Human-Centered Community Task Force.

Good

The executive director/manager upholds and models the organization's DEIA values and encourages and enables employees to do the same.

This looks like: Luisa, the director at a regional art museum, holds annual listening sessions where board members are invited to hear staff's successes and concerns about organizational culture, DEIA goals, and core values. She then works with the board to integrate the staff feedback where it is relevant to their work.

Better

The governing authority actively supports those in organizational leadership roles who ensure that diverse individuals fully participate in all aspects of the organization's work, including decision-making.

This looks like: Marceline, the friends group president at a historic house, and Tyree, the house's executive director, sit in on meetings of the Accessibility Advisory Committee and DEIA Working Group and discuss the groups' concerns as part of their quarterly touch-base meetings.



Landis Valley Village & Farm Museum (Lancaster, PA)

Big Picture Concept: Welcoming Environment

To be truly accessible, an organization must promote a welcoming environment for staff, volunteers, and visitors. This means listening to and understanding the needs of historically marginalized communities and not expecting them to assimilate into the dominant culture. Often, this means a change to the organization's way of doing things. This ties in closely with the organization's cultural competence and can be reflected in the way relationships operate between leadership and staff, staff and community members, and visitors and staff. When any one group feels unwelcome, this should be addressed promptly and with the understanding that it can lead to ripple effects in other aspects of DEIA work.

Emerging

Staff or volunteers exhibit microaggressions towards some visitors.

This looks like: Paul is waiting in line at the museum's ticketing desk with his guide dog. When it is his turn, the staff member selling him a ticket speaks more slowly and loudly than she has for the previous visitors and asks to pet the dog.



Basic

Organizational leadership navigates and negotiates internal and external resistance to change and fosters consistent and positive communication between staff and volunteers.

This looks like: Melissa is the director of a historic house museum that has just announced a capital project to improve physical accessibility of its entrances. She holds monthly update meetings with staff and volunteers to ask about concerns and share progress. When she hears an anonymous complaint that the planned ramps at the entrances “take away from the character of the house,” she facilitates a meeting with the design team, local people with mobility disabilities, and staff to have a dialogue on the pros and cons of the planned designs.



Good

Management’s decision-making processes consider potential impacts of outreach to new communities and foster a collaborative relationship among staff, volunteers, and community members.

This looks like: Lucas is the director of a science museum that is looking to reach out to the local Latinx or Hispanic community. He is aware that none of his leadership team are members of the community. He sends out an all-staff email to invite any staff or volunteers who identify as Latinx or Hispanic to join a new advisory group for this initiative and encourages staff to share the invite with relevant community organizers as well.



Better

Organizational leadership ensures that diverse individuals fully participate in all aspects of the organization’s work, including decision-making.

This looks like: Renee and Taylor are two Black women hired as assistant curators at an art museum. Their main job duties focus on addressing a backlog of collections data research, but they have expressed interest in an upcoming exhibit focused on a local Black artist. Greg, the museum director, invites Renee and Taylor to join the exhibition team and asks them to lead a project commissioning a new work from the artist for the museum’s collection.

Planning for Improvements



Basic

Plans for improvements have been documented based on an accessibility audit.

This looks like: A large art museum has brought in a consultant to do an [Accessibility Audit](#) and is using the results to fill out the Action Plan Template for their upcoming fiscal year.



Good

Members of the community and/or local organizations with relevant life experience have been consulted in the planning process.

This looks like: A children's museum is converting one of its first-floor offices into a quiet room for visitors. Marina, the museum's director of visitor services, invites local disability service organizations, parents of autistic children, and self-advocates to participate in a focus group to share feedback on a mock-up of the planned room's design and features.



Better

The organization's Accessibility Advisory group, community members, and/or partner organizations act as co-creators with staff and are involved in all phases of new projects or initiatives.

This looks like: A small historic house is looking for ways to attract visitors with combined vision and hearing loss. Neema, the director of a Deaf social services organization, hears about the museum's goals and is looking for a community venue to host monthly gatherings for Deaf and Deafblind consumers. Neema meets with Joan, the museum's educator, to discuss her idea, and they draft the plan for the program together.

Development/Fundraising



Basic

The organization has considered outside funders to support accessibility initiatives.

This looks like: Clyde, the development director at a history museum, has gotten requests from staff in the programming department to help with funding to offer monthly audio-described films. The museum's current funders are all history-focused, so Clyde does research on funders that support social services for people who are blind or low vision.



Good

Funding for each year's accommodation needs, including maintenance, is available as part of the organization's annual budget cycle.

This looks like: Amit, the director of a nature center, includes line items for maintenance of loaner wheelchairs and printing of new large-print visitor guides in his annual budget proposal to the county's Parks and Recreation Commission.



Better

There is dedicated, regular funding for each year's accommodation needs, including maintenance.

This looks like: Everard, the director of an art museum, has cultivated a relationship with a donor to create a restricted fund dedicated to accessibility. This covers costs for regular monthly tours with ASL interpreters, any CART or tactile interpreting that may be requested by visitors, and half the salary for the museum's accessibility coordinator.

Big Picture Concept: Cultural Competency

We have found the concept of [cultural competency](#) useful in helping to find a baseline of staff attitudes towards DEIA work. It gives a clear spectrum of different perspectives, from harmful to fully inclusive, that we hope others will find useful in reflecting on their own biases. This reflection is about growth, not judgment and focuses on the impact of actions, regardless of intent. We have borrowed and adapted this continuum from the K–12 education sphere to integrate with our Emerging, Basic, Good, and Better performance indicators.

As you review the chart, ask yourself the following questions:

- Where on the continuum do I see myself?
- Where do I see my team/colleagues?
- Where is our overall organizational culture?
- Where is our board?
- Where is our leadership/team?
- Where are our visitors (if we know)?

It is normal for these to all be at different levels, but keep in mind that individual change can drive organizational change. We set our indicators around the levels where most staff/volunteers are in an organization. Here are examples:

- **Basic level** organization:

Most staff exhibit traits of cultural precompetence and strive for cultural competence.

- **Good level** organization:

Most staff exhibit traits of cultural competence and strive for cultural proficiency.

- **Better level** organization:

Most staff exhibit traits of cultural competence and many exhibit traits of cultural proficiency.

Growth towards cultural proficiency is supported and modeled by leadership, with a goal of cultural proficiency becoming an organizational norm.

<<<< Cultural Competency Continuum >>>>

	Cultural Destructiveness	Cultural Incapacity	<u>Emerging:</u> Cultural Blindness
Definition	Seeking to eliminate the cultures of others in all aspects of the organization and in relationship to the community it serves.	Trivializing and stereotyping other cultures; seeking to make the cultures of others appear to be wrong or inferior to the dominant culture.	Not noticing or acknowledging the cultures of others within the organization; treating everyone the same without recognizing the needs that require differentiated interaction.
Action	<i>See the difference and stomp it out.</i>	<i>See the difference and make it wrong.</i>	<i>See the difference and act like you don't see it.</i>
Examples	<p>"This was the home of [wealthy white man], so that's the history we tell."</p> <p>"Our current visitors like the way we do things, and we don't want to do anything to alienate our volunteers and donors."</p>	<p>"Some visitors just don't know how to behave in a museum."</p> <p>"We've never had any visually impaired people come here before, so why should we add new things just for them?"</p>	<p>"I don't see color. Why do we have to look at our visitors that way?"</p> <p>"We just don't have any artifacts about disability in the collection."</p>

Chart modified from <https://www.esc4.net/Assets/cultural-proficiency-continuum.pdf> and



<p><u>Basic:</u> Cultural Precompetence</p>	<p><u>Good:</u> Cultural Competence</p>	<p><u>Better:</u> Cultural Proficiency</p>
<p>Increasing awareness of what you and the organization don't know about working in diverse settings; you and the organization can move in a positive, constructive direction, or you can falter, stop, and possibly regress.</p>	<p>Aligning your personal values and behaviors, and the organization's policies and practices, to be inclusive of cultures that are new or different from yours and the organization's; enables healthy and productive interactions.</p>	<p>Holding the vision that you and the organization are instruments for creating a socially just society; interacting with your colleagues, visitors, and the community as an advocate for preserving and sharing the histories of varied cultural groups.</p>
<p><i>See the difference and at times, respond inappropriately.</i></p>	<p><i>See the difference and value it.</i></p>	<p><i>See the difference and esteem it as an advocate for equity.</i></p>
<p>“We value all cultures. Our special exhibits focus on a different culture from our collection each year.”</p> <p>“Let’s set a goal to increase attendance from visitors with disabilities by 3 percent in the next 5 years.”</p>	<p>“Museums are not neutral. It’s our job to discuss challenging topics tied to our mission and embrace multiple points of view.”</p> <p>“Working with partners taught me that even if you have the same disability, you can have very different needs.”</p>	<p>“Staff think critically about the objects in our collection and how we interpret them.”</p> <p>“We encourage visitors to tell us what they value in an exhibition, not the other way around. We’re always learning from the communities we serve.”</p>

Staff Training

Emerging

The organization has a small budget for training. Though there isn't a training plan, there is regular training, such as docent training, every year that includes some accessibility topics.

Basic

Staff and volunteers who regularly interact with visitors receive training on how to take accommodation requests and how to operate accessibility technology (assistive listening devices, audio tours).

This looks like: Nick, the gift shop cashier, is also responsible to pass out any assistive technology visitors ask to use and help them with it. Nick also knows how to use several smart phone apps that visitors can use on their own devices, like an app that gives live verbal descriptions for blind and low-vision users.

Good

Staff and volunteers who regularly interact with visitors receive annual refresher training on how to handle accommodation requests and how to operate accessibility technology (assistive listening devices, audio tours).

This looks like: Bonnie, the museum educator, is partnering with a local adult autism club to provide an evening museum tour. One of the visitors from the club uses pictures to communicate. Before the visit, Bonnie refreshes her team on how to take time to allow people to communicate in the way that works best for them.

Better

All staff receive annual training that includes customer service as well as cultural and disability sensitivity/etiquette and unconscious bias. This training is offered on multiple levels, from basic to advanced.

This looks like: One of the new programs at the visitor center suddenly had more intense meaning than the museum expected when a current event hit on a similar subject. A volunteer docent, Frank, noticed some visitors getting into an intense debate. Frank used his training in de-escalation to redirect the whole group of visitors to use their senses to notice things about the exhibit and take a moment of quiet reflection. As the visitors focused more on their senses, the tensions eased enough for Frank to finish the tour.

Hope Lodge (Fort Washington, PA)



Hiring

Good hiring practices set the tone for the potential success of the organization and ultimately the visitors' core experiences. Supportive resources about accessibility are robust for human resources. The [ADA National Network maintains a list of resources for employers](#). In this list you will find the [Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\)](#) and the [Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion \(EARN\)](#). For more information, check out the [Human Resources Guide](#).

Emerging

The organization promotes equal employment opportunity.

This looks like: All paid position announcements include a nondiscrimination statement and list a salary range. The hiring committee is provided with instructions for what they can do or shouldn't do during interviews.

Basic

The organization actively keeps up with basic legal obligations and industry standards and encourages everyone to apply.

This looks like: Pat in Human Resources reviews position descriptions with the museum director before the hiring process begins. He works with the employment committee to prioritize the specific job functions for the position announcement. The hiring committee meets with Pat to review what questions they may not ask and what questions they can and should ask.

Maddy posts job announcements on multiple websites that follow web accessibility standards.



Good

The organization actively reviews its processes and outreach to improve how well it attracts diverse candidates.

This looks like: Wendy, the visitor services manager, found a corporate sponsor to provide stipends for three paid internships this summer. She made sure the positions were posted and processed exactly like the museum normally processes permanent positions.

This looks like: Teddy sends links for job announcements to his list of contacts to broaden the invitation to apply to the local career training centers, CILs, colleges, and associations.

Better

The organization invests time and money into being a highly desirable organization to work for, knowing that diversity improves its understanding of audiences and enhances staff knowledge and creativity.

This looks like: Employment Committee chair Khiem worked with a local job training nonprofit to offer two positions for trainees to work in the living history program at Khiem’s farm museum. The job training program pays the trainees and helps people with disabilities build practical skills for employment. The position has an option for the museum to offer permanent employment for qualified trainees if a position is available.

Staff and Volunteer Retention and Advancement

To create a welcoming environment for staff, we need to ensure that staff and volunteers feel valued and respected. The [Employer Assistance and Resource Network \(EARN\)](#) provides information to retain and advance qualified people with disabilities. Staff are motivated when they see that leadership values retention and respects staff and volunteer advancement opportunities. Volunteers and staff are supported and accountable by the same standards for reasonable accommodations in addition to the organization's core documents and policies. The ADA National Network offers a guide to [Reasonable Accommodations in the Workplace](#) and the [Human Resources Guide](#) highlights some additional supports. Detailed suggestions and training modules for accommodations are available on the [Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\)](#).

Basic

Staff and volunteers are recognized for their contributions in an appropriate and an equitable manner when compared with one another within the organization and larger community.

This looks like: Nisha and Hope are being recognized as volunteer and staff member of the month at an urban history museum. The prize for each is a check for \$50 and a dedicated parking space. Hope does not have a car and takes the subway to work, so her award is adjusted to include a 30-day transit pass as the equivalent value for the parking space.

What does this look like in your organization?

How might you move forward to the next level?



Good

Performance evaluation connects back to the organization’s core values and policies.

This looks like: Albert is a visitor services supervisor at a regional history museum. Because one of the organization’s core values is “respect for all,” part of Albert’s performance review is a survey of his direct reports to hear if and how Albert embodies this value.



Better

The organization understands that people may have different paths for advancement in their careers. Leadership fosters existing staffs’ opportunities to cross train and further education to increase staff advancement within the organization.

This looks like: Metta worked as a manager at a card store while raising her children. Now she works as an assistant manager at her local battlefield park gift shop. Store manager Juan noticed that Metta regularly makes good recommendations for books and educational games that support the programs at the battlefield. Juan is recommending that Metta cross train with the education department because he thinks she would make an excellent museum educator.
