

NSDF TOOLKIT

Embedding creative access in your work

A guide to making your theatre productions more accessible for disabled, Deaf and neurodivergent audiences.

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WHO WE ARE

Hello and welcome to this NSDF Tool Kit. This is a guide for theatre makers to make your work more accessible for your audiences and artists. To unlock the creativity inherent in access.

This guide has been compiled by Chloë Clarke (actor/musician, co-founder of Elbow Room Theatre and audio description consultant) and Nickie Miles-Wildin (director, theatre maker.) We both have lived experience of being disabled and working in the arts.

We will take you through the key elements you need to make your work as creatively accessible as possible.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Providing access means getting rid of attitudinal and physical barriers that have

always stopped disabled, Deaf and neurodivergent people going to theatre or the arts, so that as many people as possible can experience our work. Providing *creative* access means that you are including access tools in your work in a creative way - they are part of your overall vision and design rather than bolted on like an exclusive extra that's just for '*those people who need it.*'

When we use access creatively everyone is more likely to engage with and enjoy our work. We want to show you that access is a creative opportunity - another creative tool for you to use - and not a barrier.

MAKING ACCESSIBLE WORK

We are both disabled. Through years of experience we have learned how to make our work accessible - unfortunately we've never been handed a magic handbook to knowing everything about access just *because* we're disabled. Our knowledge has grown from our lived experiences and the people and companies we've worked with.

We have succeeded in making brilliant creatively accessible work. We have also failed. We continue to learn.

It's important to acknowledge that failing is part of learning, particularly with access. All disabled people are different and have different access requirements and opinions. If you start to offer creative access in your work, don't expect huge changes to happen overnight, it takes time and perseverance - it takes making it part of your everyday practice and ethos - and we promise that you will benefit from it just as much as those for whom you're providing it.

Access is a shared responsibility, and you are the future of our industry. We hope that what you learn here will help inform and shape the way art is made for future generations.

UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY: THE SOCIAL MODEL

Most of us grow up believing that disabled people are disabled because they have an impairment of some sort: physical, sensory, or cognitive. But this isn't true. This is based on the medical model of disability.

With the social model it states that people who have impairments are disabled by the physical and attitudinal structures and constraints of society - by their environment.

For example, I (Nickie) am a wheelchair user. My wheelchair doesn't make me disabled and neither does my impairment. I am disabled by any building with no level access and no working lift. Or when I am constantly treated like a child or the person that I'm with is spoken to on my behalf. Or when strangers throw coins into my coffee cup because I'm using a wheelchair and they assume I'm begging for money.

I (Chloë) am registered blind but that's not what disables me. True, I can't see in the same way as you and yes, that alone can get annoying and be difficult sometimes but I'm really only disabled by my environment - e.g. all the visual information that's designed only with sighted people in mind in public spaces (traffic lights/road crossings, signage, transport maps/timetables, etc.), or when people patronise or pity me, or when bus drivers switch off the audio announcements of stops because 'it annoys them'.

These are just a [few](#) tiny everyday examples of the barriers we encounter. In our own homes where our access requirements are met we are not disabled, we're just people who happen to have impairments. Barriers that disable us in the arts are another thing again, and we'll come to these later.

More informational on the social model can be found by clicking the links below:

Scope

[Unlimited \(version with audio description\)](#)

LANGUAGE

It's really important that you feel confident and comfortable talking with disabled, Deaf and neurodivergent people. The most appropriate language to use is based on the social model and understanding this model will help you determine the best language to use.

As we've discussed, the social model explains that someone is disabled by one's environment and other people's attitudes or ignorance rather than by one's impairment.

Our guide to language below is a good starting point, but the best thing to do is always **ask the individual or group** how they want to be identified.

- **Disabled person/people**, because we're disabled by society and not by our impairment → **NOT 'people with a disability/disabilities'** - that would imply that the impairment IS the disability. Many large/international organisations

still use 'persons with disabilities' as standard language and a lot of disabled people will say 'I have a disability' or 'because of my disability' but that's outdated and usually because they haven't been made aware of the social model themselves (we didn't know about it until we were well into our 20s - it's not common knowledge, which needs to change).

- We might say we have a **physical, mobility or sensory impairment** (eg. someone who uses a wheelchair has a physical impairment, someone who is deaf or blind has a sensory impairment).
- **Non-disabled person - NOT 'able bodied'**. Able bodied is a HORRIBLE term that makes us feel totally useless and paints disabled people as being the problem. Our bodies are able, thanks - we may have to do a few things differently from non-disabled people - but the reason they (or you) are non-disabled

is because you don't have to face the barriers that society has created for those of us with impairments.

- **Wheelchair user** - please don't say 'wheelchair bound' or 'in a wheelchair.' We use wheelchairs as an access tool to get us from A to B - they are a positive rather than a negative thing and we're not 'stuck' in them. Some people are part-time wheelchair users so can stand and walk short distances.
- Deaf and hard of hearing - the Deaf community has its own language and therefore its own culture. This includes choosing not to identify as disabled, and largely preferring not to use the term 'impairment' too. There is a wide range of preferences regarding language within the Deaf community and some deaf people don't identify as being part of the Deaf community either so may prefer different terms. Until 2021 it was often written 'D/deaf' to cater to more people, but now we're going with Deaf, deaf,

Hard of Hearing (HoH), partially deaf, a BSL user. Again, it's always best to ask the individual or group.

- Blind, visually impaired or partially sighted. These are all accurate and perfectly acceptable terms - some people say that they have sight loss, but not everybody does as some may have been born with their impairment. Visually impaired is the most commonly used term and covers all bases. We often say 'VIP' or 'VI person'.
- **Neurodiverse and neurodivergent** - relatively new terminology that describes anyone who would have previously been called 'learning disabled.' It's a broad, umbrella term and some may prefer to use language pertaining to their specific condition or impairment (eg. Autism, ADHD, dyslexia). The difference between the two terms: an **individual is neurodivergent** and a **group is neurodiverse**.

Bear in mind that, because not all disabled people are aware of the social model, there is still often quite a debate about what language to use. It's best to stick to the social model language we've outlined unless you're asked specifically not to (and if so, don't feel that you can't question why) - that way you can easily justify why you're using the language you are.

The key to language

Don't panic - just be natural and if you're not sure: ask. Although it may feel difficult to broach we would much rather be asked than know somebody is unsure and tiptoeing around the issue as that makes it really awkward!

Now that you've got an understanding of language and the social model it's time to take you through the barriers that exist in the arts and how we can use creative access and other means to tackle them.

Getting Started

There are many creative tools available to you to make your work accessible and engaging. We've found in our own work and through collaborations with others that making work accessible in a creative way enhances the experience for everyone.

As you start thinking about the production you are making, even before rehearsals begin, access should be there with you. Allow it to factor into the initial ideas you have, be part of your design process, your casting process, your devising process. Really consider how each element will feed into your work. It's a creative opportunity for making sure there aren't any barriers to your work from the very beginning.

What to consider

From the outset of your project think about *who* you want to make this work for. It's important to note that trying to make something that's completely accessible to absolutely everyone is impossible - we're all

different with different requirements and tastes, and the truth is that some forms of access can be mutually exclusive. So start small and branch out:

- What is your idea?
- Is it largely audio or visual based?
- Would it lend itself particularly well to either a visually impaired, Deaf or neurodivergent audience?
- In which case, how best can we incorporate access to enhance the idea and make it as enticing and exciting as possible?
- Could you include more characters to either perform as BSL actors/interpreters or audio describers?
- Would it be more interesting to incorporate audio description in a way that was completely invisible and very clever?
- Do you want any access tool you use to be explicit or more stealthy? Do you want to make a statement with it or include it in a more subtle way?
- Might it be exciting to stage your piece in a more unconventional style that

happens to really work for neurodivergent people and others?

Audio Description and access for visually impaired people.

Audio description is an access tool for ViPs that, traditionally, verbally describes the visual aspects of a show to those who can't see them. AD is always developing and progressing and there are now 3 broad categories of audio description (there are also many sub-categories):

1. Traditional AD
2. Creative AD
3. Integrated AD

These can overlap with one another - they're not mutually exclusive and you can use more than one form in any given piece of work. None of these provisions are necessarily better than the other (although there may be issues inherent within each) - everyone simply has different preferences. Being candid, my personal preference is to move away from traditional formats towards a more integrated, creative experience.

Traditional Audio Description

This is the version most people will be familiar with - you might have switched it on your TV by accident and wondered where that weird omnipotent voice narrating the action was coming from.

In theatre, VI audience members listen to an AD track via headphones, written and delivered by an audio describer who has perhaps attended one or two rehearsals and has gone away and written the script alone. This means that the AD is totally separate

from the creative process, has little bearing on the show itself, is only heard by any VIPs requesting it and the actors and director never know what it contains. There are a load of different reasons that this is problematic - not least because it aims to be 'objective' and is therefore stark and bland and takes you out of the world of the play - but some VIPs do prefer it (generally older people) because it's a set standard and they know what to expect.

In addition to the artistic and creative problems inherent to this style, historically it hasn't helped awareness, being invisible, and has only been offered for one performance out of an entire run (if you're lucky) - so if you can't make that one performance (usually a weekday matinee, think about the assumptions made there) you can't see that show at all. Most VIPs don't like wearing headsets - it isolates you from those you're with and makes you feel conspicuous and uncomfortable. We should have just as much choice of which show to attend as the sighted audience, but this isn't the case.

Creative Audio Description

This takes a big step towards creativity - it may or may not still be delivered via headset but will potentially be performed by actors (preferably either with AD experience or the team has worked with an AD Consultant or Describer) either playing specially created characters or characters that are already intrinsic to the show (in Graeae's *Reasons to be Cheerful* one character talks to 'his mum' on the phone onstage throughout. He's actually delivering the AD through a transmitter to the VI audience who wear headphones).

If not done via headset it could feature characters on stage performing AD live for all audience to hear or a prerecorded character's voice that can be heard by everyone (Birds of Paradise' *Wendy Hoose* features a sarcastic AD commentary - a pre-recorded talking phone app that has become sentient comments on the action). This makes AD visible (or rather audible) to the whole audience which means it challenges

you to create AD that enhances the show for everyone equally - Wendy Hoose is a good example because the AD track was very funny and it added exponentially to the show for VI and sighted alike.

Integrated Audio Description

This incorporates AD into the script from the very beginning. Using an AD Consultant from the conception stage of the piece you collaborate throughout to incorporate AD in a way that either sets up AD as a creative device that's integral to the piece or you work towards creating what I call 'Stealth AD', which means its woven into the piece so naturally that it goes totally unnoticed by the audience. Here is an example:

SOUP

Traditional

Naima sits at the dinner table. Julie sits opposite. Naima takes a mouthful of the

soup and grimaces. Annoyance flashes across Julie's face.

Integrated into the text

Julie Here you are
(We hear her put down the soup bowl)

Naima Thanks
(We hear the spoon on the bowl and her blowing on, then eating, the soup)

Beat

Julie: (*Annoyed*) Don't you make that face, I slaved for hours over that.

You could add a noise from Naima to indicate her displeasure. Most of the information is conveyed by identifiable

sounds and the character's responses - basically, less is more. Sound and tone play an integral part.

Here's a link to a video by our good friend [Amelia Cavallo](#) about the potential of integrated audio description (it also features a good explanation of AD more generally) and a clip of her drag king performance. Her AD in this example is integrated while being quite explicit.

So, whether you're planning to employ a professional describer to provide 'traditional' AD or to integrate AD into your piece with the help of a consultant, conversations should be held about this early on.

- Research and contact audio describers and consultants to inform your funding application. You can find details of both [here](#) (we're often happy to travel - so include expenses in your budget - or work online so

don't worry about location). The [Audio Description Association](#) has a list of traditional describers across the UK.

- Have conversations about your options with both of the above.
- Plan what type of description best suits your work.
- Engage the whole company to work with the consultant/describer so that everyone is contributing to the access and aware of access requirements during performance.

Touch Tours

These are a great way to ensure your VI audience can be fully immersed in your world. It's an opportunity for us to get into the performance space ahead of the show and move around it, getting a sense of it, as well as having a meet and greet with the cast and getting a closer look at (ideally, also touching, though in our current COVID world

that can be difficult) the costumes, props and set. This is just as important as audio description in our immersion into the world of your work. Without it, even with AD we can never really get our own sense of where you're taking everyone else.

Touch Tour Tips

- Depending on the size of your cast, you may decide to only introduce a few actors - ideally the principals. They should be in costume and bring any additional costumes (and relevant props) with them if playing multiple roles.
- Where the cast multi-role, it's useful for actors to demonstrate how they differentiate between characters with their voice and physicality.

- Arrange for the company present during the TT to discuss it with the describer (or the person running the tour) beforehand so that everybody feels comfortable.
- Work with the person running the TT to establish which elements to introduce the VI audience to.
- Ensure that the whole company is aware of the importance of a TT, who they are for, and why.
- Keep it relatively short (maximum 20 mins) - if a TT is too long it can be overwhelming and hard to retain the information.
- Make sure that you advertise the TT clearly and accessibly with plenty of notice - be clear on what time it will be held (this is to be agreed between the company and venue).

- Many companies choose to hold the TT an hour or so before the performance - it is advisable to consider doing it as part of a pre-show so that VIPs can take their seats for the performance just before the house opens.
- As the venue is the first point of contact for the audience, staff across all departments need to be informed about TTs (and all other access forms being provided), especially box office and front of house staff.

Neurodivergent audiences may take up the offer of a touch tour as it enables them to navigate the space, meet the cast etc.

Model boxes

These are a great way of offering some info to the VI audience in the foyer before going into the show. While others can enjoy lovely glossy programmes and flyers, usually these aren't made

accessible in any fun kind of way for us (we get a sheet of A4 paper with large print info on it if we're lucky). A model box is scaled-down, 3D model of what the set looks like - similar to the one a designer usually makes for the start of rehearsals - but more hardy and with the intention of it being available for VIPs to touch and look closely at to get a sense of the set and what's in it.

Accessible Marketing

It's important to realise that traditional ways of spreading the word about your work will not be likely to reach VIPs. Flyers, posters, posts on social media and articles on a venue or your company website are mostly visual media and so exclude us. The good news is you can create accessible flyers, programmes, posters and SM posts that are much more likely to get the job done.

Here are some examples:

Rather than creating alternative accessible formats, use your AD Consultant to guide you on marketing design and copy that is inherently accessible. Here's the [trailer](#) from my show back in 2018. And an example of [audio flyers and programmes](#) from the same show. Our printed flyer featured a QR code that led to the audio and was 16pt Ariel font as standard though nobody would have thought that this was for access purposes, it was just the style of the flyer.

Other online material

On social media we added alt text to all our images so that screen readers could access the pictures. We also added image descriptions in text for any VIPs who don't use screen readers.

Many websites aren't accessible so it's worth revising yours or having conversation with venues that are promoting your work to see if they're aware they should be following minimum web accessibility standards. Ideally, you'd have a VIP tester look over

websites to ascertain how accessible they are (don't expect people to do this for free).

Engaging your audience

Outreach is an important part of growing your VI audience. Because we have been excluded from the arts for so long we will assume it isn't for us unless we're told otherwise. You have to consistently offer access and not expect lots of VIPs to turn up because you've provided one accessible performance - that won't happen. We're a hard to reach group for the reasons stated thought out this chapter, so conducting research and reaching out to VI groups to establish relationships is important. It's extra work at first but will pay off in the long run.

The VI experience

It's also important to know that a VIP's experience of going to the theatre is very different from yours from start to finish: firstly, it's unlikely we'll even hear about your show,

then it's hard to book tickets, then it's hard to get to the venue, then around it - finding box office, loos, bar and seats - let alone then enjoying a performance (because most of them aren't accessible). This is why a VI audience can be hard to reach, because that's always been our experience, but you can change that.

For more detailed info on how you can change that, what the VI experience is like and much more on access and inclusion, see Chloë's Arts Council guide [Developing Visually Impaired Audiences in Wales](#) (not just applicable to Wales).

Working with Visually Impaired People (VIP's)

First of all, **ask about any access requirements** (and budget for these in your funding bid - **the Arts Council offers additional funds on top of your project budget for any Deaf or Disabled employees/collaborators**).

By law, you need to make reasonable adjustments when working with any disabled people in order to make the experience fair and equal.

Some VIP's access requirements might include:

Access Workers and Personal Assistants, materials to be provided in alternative formats, assistance with or adaptations to transport and accommodation, frequent breaks, the lighting in the room (and during performance) to be negotiated, awareness training for colleagues and venue staff, conversations to be had with venues and production staff, an access rider to be provided by the VIP/s in question.

It's best practice to send out an access requirements form when casting for roles or advertising jobs to ALL applicants so that it's not just something you do for disabled people - everyone has some form of access requirement, eg. a parent may need childcare taken into consideration or someone who donates't consider themselves

to be disabled might benefit from sides/scripts being provided in an alternative format (on yellow paper, for example).

The key is to have open conversations and show that you're aware that you have a responsibility to make adjustments, and that you're happy to accommodate any requirements. If you encounter barriers to providing access talk to the Arts Council or someone in an advisory capacity to see what can be done to resolve these.

Access for Deaf audiences

BSL

British Sign Language is the preferred language of over 87,000 Deaf people in the UK. Therefore, it is most definitely worth thinking about how you can integrate BSL into your work.

You can integrate one (or more) Deaf or interpreter characters into your work instead of having them stand to one side. What's the aesthetic of your piece and how can an interpreter or Deaf translator be creatively included in this? Can they be in costume? How can the actors interact with them? If you do decide to do this it is best practice to invite the Deaf translator or BSL interpreter into rehearsals allowing them to see the play, meet the cast and together you can work out how they can be integrated. By being in rehearsals they can gain an understanding of the characters, create character sign names and when they multi role they have a clear understanding of intentions. Integrating BSL is about making it fit the style of your production. It is part of your vision, the art of telling this story you have chosen.

Please remember that translating a script can take time therefore ensure scripts are sent out as soon as possible.

BSL does not always have to be live. Some theatre companies have prerecorded BSL such as Graeae's [Blasted](#) and [Birds of Paradise](#) Wendy Hoose. They have integrated them into the set design. For example, in [Wendy Hoose](#) which was set in a bedroom, the prerecorded BSL translation was shown on the TV that was part of the set.

You can also look to work with Deaf actors who use BSL and cast them in your work. Definitely do this if you have a Deaf character in a play. Again, please remember that script translation takes time therefore support your actor with this, providing extra paid time before rehearsals is good practice.

Some examples of integrating BSL include [My Mother Said](#) by Fingersmiths Theatre Company and [Nadia Nadarajah](#) talking about her experience working with the RSC.

When integrating BSL into your work please work with a Deaf consultant. There are many Deaf BSL consultants such as Daryl

Jackson, David Ellington, Jean St Clair, Deepa Shastri to name a few. They will assist with the translation and ensure it works well for Deaf audiences.

To find a BSL Interpreter the [ASLI](#) website is a great place to start.

Theatre Interpreters

[Theatre Sign Performance Interpreting](#)

It is also worth asking people for recommendations, particularly when looking for a performance interpreter. Not every interpreter will want to perform or have the skills to do so.

Remember to have a qualified sign language interpreter. Sign Language Interpreters cost in the region of £260 per day and it is good practice to have two interpreters when you are working with a Deaf person or even for events like an after show Q&A.

Follow companies such as [Graeae](#), [Deafinitely Theatre](#), [Red Earth](#) and [Hot Coals](#) to help gain an understanding of the creative potential of integrating BSL into your work.

Captioning

Captioning is a way to provide word to text translation to make audio content accessible for people who are hard of hearing or Deaf. A screen is set to the side and the captions, which are preprogrammed (as simply as power point) can run alongside the rehearsal or show.

Captions are sometimes useful for older audiences or for those who English is not their first language.

It is worth considering how you can *creatively* embed the captions in your set. There's nothing worse than someone having to look to the side for captions and missing the action, therefore can they be part of the set and not just to one side? Ask your designer to have this in mind when they begin designing the show. Be creative. Consider a video designer to be part of your creative team. Even better, a Deaf video designer.

You can design captions yourself using a programme as simple as PowerPoint with a laptop hooked up to a projector. Think about using different colours and fonts for the different characters. Research the most suitable colours and fonts.

There are a few programmes you can use to enhance the creativity of the captions. Ben Glover, a Deaf video designer, lists them here on [creative captioning website](#)

When I (Nickie) directed *Cuttin It* at The Royal Exchange Theatre we had two caption screens at either side of the stage and used different fonts for the characters to show their characteristics - a scribbly looking font for the chaotic character and a neater more considered font for the other. In hindsight, the scribbly font was not the most legible and we should have chosen a different one. We also used various backgrounds on the slides to help set the environment for each scene. For example, ruled note paper for the school scenes, wallpaper patterns for the home scenes. Bus stop style captioning when they were at the bus stop. Make sure the backgrounds are not too busy as this can detract from the text.

Make sure audiences can see the captions from anywhere in the theatre and it's also key that the actors know where the captions are.

More examples of integrated creative captioning can be found on [creative captioning website](#).

BSL Flyer

A BSL flyer or trailer is a short film outlining the play with booking information, times, venue etc. It is an exciting way to work with a Deaf actor, translator or British sign language interpreter to communicate information to Deaf audiences about your play. Please ensure that your play is accessible to Deaf audiences before you do this.

Relaxed Performances or Relaxed Environment Performances

These are performances with a more relaxed environment towards sound and movement. By providing relaxed performances you will widen the audiences who come to your show. You are welcoming people who might otherwise feel excluded from attending the theatre, such as people who identify as

neurodivergent, learning disabled, movement disorders or those with babies/young children.

Relaxed performances do not have to be complicated and with support of everyone in your company and the venue you can easily implement them.

Guidelines are:

- Ensure that the audience know it's a relaxed performance and what that means.
- Pre show information is available. This describes what to expect from the show. An easy read synopsis is a great tool. An example of Graeae's easy read synopsis for House of Bernarda Alba can be viewed [here](#)
- An introduction at the start of the show reminding that it's a relaxed performance with the freedom to move around, make noise etc. The actors will introduce themselves and which character they are playing.

- Doors to the foyer space will be left open throughout the performance.
- There will be a quiet space outside the auditorium where people can go to as and when needed.
- House lights may stay on at a low level throughout.
- Loud noises have been lowered slightly

Tourettes Hero (Jess Thom) explains in more detail about relaxed performances and has been key to implementing them in theatre. Click [here](#) for a link to the website

Jess has also been working with a sonic story to also highlight access regarding the noise in performances. This can be given to audiences before the show or provided on a venue website. It highlights the levels of noise in the show so people are aware before they come to the theatre.

View the Sonic Story info for Not I at HOME in Manchester [here](#)

Social Story

A social story is a montage of photos explaining someone's journey from arrival at the venue to what they may have to navigate. Such as where the entrance or stage door is. What the building looks like. What the rehearsal space or theatre is like etc. It's a great tool for people to check access and to familiarise themselves for the journey. As a wheelchair user with anxiety I find it incredibly useful as puts my mind at rest having to navigate a new space and to plan parking nearby etc.

Here's a link to an example by [Theatre Royal Nottingham](#)

Funding and budgets

It's so important to think about how you're going to pay for the access you want to incorporate - access specialists like consultants or interpreters can charge around £300 per day, so make sure you think

about this before applying for funding and do your research.

- Contact any individuals or groups who can give you quotes or signpost you to the right people (we are 2 such individuals, just so you know).
- Negotiate fees based on the amount of involvement you want from the provider.
- Make sure you talk to them early on to establish how much time you'll need from them and at what stages throughout the process.
- If you're working with artists who have access requirements, these access costs can be funded in addition to your budget through the Arts Council - speak to your Arts Council contact about this.

Marketing & social media

How are you going to reach your audience, bearing in mind that not everyone engages with visual or audio material? We've covered

this above in our sections about access for VI and Deaf audiences but, in a nutshell, think about:

- Audio flyers and programmes
- BSL flyers and programmes
- Easy read flyers and programmes
- Larger print as standard
- Using a VI or Deaf consultant to advise you on accessible images and communication
- Using ALT text for screen readers in all social media posts and web content
- Adding image descriptions as standard to all images
- Creating social stories

For all of the above, don't just supply additional accessible formats that are boring versions of the glossy cool marketing you deliver for everyone else - think about how you make these accessible formats just as interesting and engaging or, better still, find creative ways to incorporate access into your

general marketing design so everyone can access the same thing.

Access requirements and access riders

A lot of creatives and performers will be able to outline what their requirements are early on so that these can be catered for from the start - you need to consider these for communication when casting and implement them for auditioning right the way through to rehearsals and performance. Access requirements are what do you require put in place to enable you do your best work.

Access riders are a good way to have a written list of requirements that can inform you and all the venues you might be touring to. They're just the same as any rider that a venue would expect to receive prior to the company's arrival but ensure that they have it well in advance as some access requirements need time to implement.

There are some instances in which artists won't know what some of their requirements are until they're in any given environment or situation. You need to facilitate open conversations about this before you work

with them to establish expectations and provide any relevant information about where you'll be auditioning, rehearsing and performing so that artists can ascertain what they might need. It's also important to be flexible throughout the process and keep these conversations going so that any requirements that pop up can be met.

It's good to ask the artist about if and how they'd like their colleagues to be made aware of their access requirements too. This could mean a conversation with the whole team at the start or quietly supporting the artist to broach individual issues as they arise - but ask them how they want to approach it and support this.

Common access requirements can include:

- **Communication** - whether this is BSL, having scripts in different formats, how you run your audition and rehearsals in terms of interaction and physical set up, how an access worker or communicator can be included if that's necessary (to be

ascertained through conversations beforehand).

- **Physical environment** - for starters, ensure this is an accessible space for wheelchair users. This includes all facilities (accessible toilet, kitchen etc.) and that it's within a more widely accessible building. See if it's possible to have a break out space and if alternative seating or a space to rest or lie down can be provided. Other physical aspects of the space are important for sensory impaired artists, which leads to...
- **Lighting** - this is vital for both VIPs and BSL users, interpreters need to be well lit as do those who are speaking in case anyone is lipreading. Standing in front of windows so that you're silhouetted makes it very difficult for Deaf and VI people. Strong light can be tricky for many VIPs who are light sensitive (many are). This is also important when thinking about how you're lighting your show - be guided by your actors in terms of what they need and what is comfortable

(spend a bit of extra time early in tech to establish this).

- **Awareness in the wider building** - often, at audition and rehearsals, you won't be the first person an artist encounters. It's important that the people who they do meet are aware of their requirements and how to interact - this is partly your responsibility and you can start by telling them what you and the artist expect of them. You can then facilitate discussions between the artist and wider building staff, pass on the information you're given or ensure that you are the first person to be there in the given situation (eg. audition).

Links to Access Riders

[Alexandrina Helmsley](#)

[Little Cog](#)

Physical Access for wheelchair users and mobility impaired people

Many theatres and studios (or alternative rehearsal spaces) are not equipped for wheelchair users; front of house, stage, backstage and rehearsal room access is often non-existent - no accessible toilet, no ramp to actually get on to the stage, no space in dressing rooms or backstage, sometimes not even a way into the building. This means that you either can't cast any wheelchair users in that particular show or you must either adapt the space you're working in or move somewhere else. It's important that venues take responsibility for this, but it's equally important that you take a stand about it or at least find out before thinking about casting whether the space you'll be working in is accessible.

Physical access into and within the building is a key player here, unsurprisingly - this includes all front of house spaces (bar, box office, toilets, etc.), also outside the building - is accessible parking available? Is the entrance not just accessible but actually welcoming to wheelchair users? Escape

routes (not for if the show is rubbish but in case of emergency) - are there accessible fire exits? (you'd be surprised how often this ISN'T the case).

Booking: can a wheelchair user easily book an accessible seat in the auditorium (what is often called a 'wheelchair space')? Can they bring a PA for free?

Find out the above and provide the information on your website or social media. This will show audiences that you are taking their access requirements into account and value their attendance at your production.

This is the start of a working document and we are continually adding to it. Keep checking back for updates.

Sections to come are rehearsal room tips, online working access.

We hope that you'll work with many disabled, Deaf and neurodivergent artists during your careers and see the creative opportunity of integrating access into your work.

Links to Other Resources:

[Integrated Access by Louise Fryer and Amelia Cavallo](#)

[Demystifying Access – A guide for producers and performance makers](#)

[Graeae Media Language Guide](#)