# Access as a Civil Right:
# Disability Inclusion and the Role of Museums

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It has been almost 28 years since the American's with Disabilities Act was passed. Yet many people continue to view access as a charitable act rather than as a civil right. Can museums play a role—through practices, programs and exhibits—in creating a more accessible and inclusive future?

Disability is often viewed by society in a negative light, as something to be fixed. We'll explore how disability is represented in the media and in society and suggest a different lens for viewing disability, one that recognizes that disability is as an aspect of diversity that is part of human variation.

## 10 stereotypical portrayals of people with disabilities:

1. The disabled person as pitiable or pathetic
2. An object of curiosity or violence
3. Sinister or evil
4. The super cripple
5. As atmosphere
6. Laughable
7. His/her own worst enemy
8. As a burden
9. As non-sexual
10. Being unable to participate in daily life

Paul Hunt (1991)

**Other ways disability is represented:**

- Object of charity
- "Better off dead" or "a fate to be feared"
- Inspirational

**Why does it matter? Because people with disabilities continue to be…**

- Excluded from the diversity conversation
- Excluded by diversity organizations due to lack of access and biased views of disability
- Nondisabled people in roles playing people with disabilities
- Excluded by design
- Seen as the problem, patronized, discriminated against, and not taken seriously

**Disability doesn't make you exceptional, but questioning what you think you know about it does.**

Stella Young

## Definitions

**impairment (or condition):** an injury, illness, or congenital condition that causes or is likely to cause a loss or difference of physiological or psychological function.

**disability:** the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in society on an equal level with others due to social and environmental barriers.

Changing how we think about disability leads us to respond differently. Considering the diversity of visitors to your parks and museums and planning accordingly will help all visitors feel more welcomed. We'll discuss both social and environmental barriers and look at solutions for designing with access and inclusion in mind.

**Design has the power to make us feel competent or incompetent; it has the power to include us or exclude us.**

Elaine Ostroff
Founding Director
Institute for Human-Centered Design

**A community that excludes even one of its members is no community at all.**

Dan Wilkins

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**Stats**

About 56.7 million people in the US have a disability. That's 1 in 5.

According to 2010 US Census

## The ADA is civil rights legislation that prohibits discrimination based on disability.

**Types of Access**

- Architectural
- Program

**Architectural Access**

- Ramps…but more than ramps
- ADAAG
- ADA Checklist for Readily Achievable Barrier Removal

Readily achievable means "easily accomplishable and able to be carried out without much difficulty or expense"

**A few checkpoints:**

- Can a person using a wheelchair enter your facility?
- Can a person using a wheelchair or walker use your restroom?
- Are there trip hazards outside or inside the facility?
- Are there low-hanging objects that might present a hazard to someone who is blind?
- Can counters be accessed by a person using a wheelchair?

**Maintaining Access**

- **It may have been built accessible, but is it staying accessible?**

**Program Access**

- Includes all policies, practices and procedures that permit people with disabilities to participate in programs and to access important information
- Goes beyond architectural access to include effective communication and reasonable modifications

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**Program access checkpoints:**

- Do you include information about how to request accommodations on event flyers and on your website?
- Do your policies and practices include access for a person who has a service animal?
- Are staff trained to avoid discriminating against people with disabilities who want to enjoy your park, programs and facilities?
- Are exhibits in your visitor center accessible?
- Are brochures available in digital format?
- Are staff trained to avoid discriminating against people with disabilities who want to enjoy your park, programs and facilities?
- Have you considered how to make your hikes, programs and activities accessible upon request?

**Effective Communication**

The ADA requires public programs to communicate with people with disabilities in ways that are equally effective to communication with people without disabilities.

This may be accomplished through the provision of auxiliary aids and services—a sign language interpreter, real-time captioning, a reader, alternate formats, use of plain language or other accommodations.

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# Resources

## *Websites*

### ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities

http://adachecklist.org/doc/fullchecklist/ada-checklist.pdf

### ADA-Related Webinars

https://www.accessibilityonline.org/ao/archives/

### ADA and Hospitality

http://www.adahospitality.org/at-your-service

### Design for Accessibility: A Cultural Administrator's Handbook

https://www.arts.gov/publications/design-accessibility-cultural-administrators-handbook

### Example of site providing information about accessibility

https://www.exploratorium.edu/visit/accessibility

### Making Temporary Exhibits Accessible

https://adata.org/publication/temporary-events-guide

### Maintaining Accessibility in Museums

https://www.ada.gov/business/museum_access.htm

### National Center on Accessibility

http://www.ncaonline.org/index.shtml

### Rethinking Representation of Disability in Museums and Galleries

https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/rcmg/projects/rethinking-disability-representation-1/rdrsmallest.pdf

### Smithsonian Accessibility Guide

http://accessible.si.edu/pdf/Smithsonian%20Guidelines%20for%20accessible%20design.pdf

### Southwest ADA Center

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http://www.southwestada.org

**Southwest ADA Center Regional Affiliate - Arkansas**

https://uofapartners.uark.edu/projects/ada-regional/

**Universal Design for Museum Learning Experiences**

https://www.mos.org/UniversalDesign

*Articles*

Ginley, Barry, "Museums:  A Whole New World for Visually Impaired People," *Disability Studies Quarterly,* Vol. 33, No. 3, 2013, (Accessed January 15, 2014). Written by the first Disability and Access Officer of the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, this article outlines process of the implementing a museum wide strategy to provide inclusive access for all visitors.  Examples of the use of touch objects, braille, and tactile books as well as audio described events are especially useful.

Smith, Heather J. L., Barry Ginley and Hannah Goodwin. "Beyond Compliance?  Museums, disability and the law," in Richard Sandell and Eithne Nightingale, eds., *Museums, Equality and Social Justice.*  New York: Routledge, 2012, pp. 59-71.

Werb, Shari Rosenstein and Tari Hartman Squire. "Transforming Practice:  Disability perspectives and the museum," in Richard Sandell, Jocelyn Dodd, and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, eds., *Re-Presenting Disability:  Activism and Agency in the Museum,* New York: Routledge, 2010, pp. 213-227.

*Requesting Interpreters:*

Communication Plus – 501-224-2521

Communicating Hands – 374-5293

Sign Language Interpreting Network in Northwest, Ark. – 479-268-2417

*Requesting Braille*

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