

Empowering Arts Professionals with Disabilities:

Resources for Arts Employers



Careers in the Arts Toolkit

Promoting Equity, Access, and Inclusion in the Arts for People with Disabilities

Credits

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Cover image: Gospel music ensemble Blind Boys of Alabama. Photo by Jim Herrington

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A Note About Person- and Identity-First Language:

The National Endowment for the Arts and Art Beyond Sight recognize that there are multiple preferences for the terminology to use when referring to people with disabilities. Some individuals with disabilities prefer the use of person-first language (e.g., people who are blind), emphasizing the person over their disability. Others prefer identity-first language (e.g., disabled artist, blind person) because they view their disability as an integral part of who they are. Within this toolkit, you will find intentional uses of both person-first and identity-first language.

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Resources for Arts Employers and Presenters

Arts employers—that is, organizations that hire, present, curate, and cast artists and other arts workers—play a key role in fostering disability inclusion and equity within the arts and culture field. Performing arts organizations, arts presenters, museums, galleries, performing arts centers, arts education organizations, and many other types of arts employers have an opportunity to increase equity and artistic innovation by employing people with disabilities.

According to the [Centers for Disease Control](#), people with disabilities are a force that is more than 61 million strong, representing America’s largest minority group. Within that group is an untapped talent pool of artists, performers, educators, cultural workers, and other aspiring professionals poised and ready to contribute to the arts world and build a successful career.

Weaving disability into diversity efforts enriches artistic creation and can only benefit arts organizations. Disability is a crucial part of Diversity Equity Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA), and recruiting, hiring, accommodating, and retaining people with disabilities is key to ensuring diversity and talent.

According to dancer and choreographer Alice Sheppard, people with disabilities provide crucial unique artistic perspectives:

“When disabled artists and disability artistry are not centered, supported, and welcomed as important contributors to the field, the field misses out on the innovation, creativity, imagination, and artistry that comes from the disability community. Audiences and artists should know our work. As people invested in the arts, we owe it to ourselves and to the future to engage with the work of disabled artists.”

In an [NEA Arts magazine article](#) the late DisArt co-founder Chris Smit explains:

“Art, a natural vehicle for discussions about being different, has always offered me a rich terrain to investigate, critique, and celebrate the experience of physical disability.” Smit believed that “disability is not focused on struggling against adversity but rather experiencing one’s disability as a *form of art*; day-to-day living that requires creativity, perseverance, honesty, and courage; a manifestation of how radical both art and disability can be.”

This section of the toolkit explains the many benefits of disability inclusion and equity in the arts field, and shares tools and resources that can help you reap them for your organization.

In this section you will find information on:

- The importance and benefits of disability equity in the arts
- How to make your organization and programs accessible
- Proactive steps to recruit and support disabled artists and employees
- Job accommodations and other responsibilities for arts employers

[NEA Webinar: Careers in the Arts: Promoting Access, Equity, and Inclusion for People with Disabilities](#)

For more on how arts presenters and employers can increase disability equity in the arts, read this conversation between NEA Dance Director Sara Nash with Kinetic Light's Alice Sheppard and Laurel Lawson: [Disability and Equity in the Arts: A Conversation with Alice Sheppard and Laurel Lawson of Kinetic Light](#)



Jerron Herman, Laurel Lawson, and Alice Sheppard from Kinetic Light, *Wired*. Photo by Robbie Sweeny

Disability Equity and Inclusion: An Imperative for Arts Employers

Is your arts organization disability-inclusive? If not, you're not attracting the widest pool of patrons. What's more, you're also missing out on potential talent to work, produce, or perform for your organization. People with disabilities offer diverse skills and creative, "out of the box" thinking, which are highly coveted skills in the arts arena.

Learn why many arts organizations and cultural institutions are learning the "business case" for fostering a disability-inclusive arts work culture:

- Companies that improve disability inclusion over time outpace their counterparts who don't, according to a 2018 [study by Accenture](#) in partnership with Disability:IN and the American Association of People with Disabilities. Specifically, the study found that, over a four-year period, 45 companies recognized as leaders in disability inclusion achieved 28 percent higher revenue; double the net income, and 30 percent higher profit margins than those with lower disability inclusion ratings.
- A [systematic review of peer-reviewed research between 1997 and 2017](#) showed that hiring people with disabilities brought improvements in profitability (e.g., profits and cost-effectiveness, turnover and retention, reliability and punctuality, employee loyalty, and company image), competitive advantage (e.g., diverse customers, customer loyalty and satisfaction, innovation, productivity, work ethic, and safety), inclusive work culture, and ability awareness.
- A [study by the American Institutes for Research](#) (2018) reveals that people with disabilities are the 3rd largest market segment in the United States. Thus, by employing people with disabilities, arts organizations can gain valuable perspectives on how to serve an important customer and audience base.
- Ensuring that people with disabilities have the workplace supports they need to succeed on the job is seldom expensive or difficult. Rather, research from the Job Accommodation Network reveals that such accommodations are generally [low cost and high impact](#).

Despite these benefits, people with disabilities remain underrepresented in the workforce, including arts and culture professions. Arts organizations and cultural institutions have a vital role to play in changing this by taking proactive steps to ensure equity for people with disabilities seeking employment across arts and culture disciplines. By ensuring organizations are disability-inclusive, arts employers not only enrich their own artistic

products and services, but also help more people participate in and contribute to arts and culture across the nation.

Where to Learn More:

- [Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion](#)

Note: Thank you to the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), as well as its Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) and Campaign for Disability Employment, for permission to use its content in this section of the toolkit.



Christine Bruno, actor, teaching artist, and disability equity consultant, with Jem Dobbs in the musical *Raspberry*, Fittings Multimedia Arts, UK. Photo by Tim Morozzo

Making Your Arts Institution Equitable and Inclusive

Disability equity and inclusion are not simply legal issues. They relate to all aspects of an arts or cultural institution's operations and strengthen the institution for everyone—staff members and visitors alike. In its Core Standards for Museums, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) includes accessibility in three of its core standards relating to a cultural institution's public trust and accountability. The AAM notes that a cultural institution:

- Strives to be inclusive and offers opportunities for diverse participation;
- Demonstrates a commitment to providing the public with physical and intellectual access to the cultural institution and its resources;
- Complies with local, state, and federal laws, codes, and regulations applicable to its facilities, operations, and administration.

An inclusive cultural institution has an ongoing commitment to the communities it serves, to awareness training for staff, and to sensitivity in hiring. Diversifying the cultural institution's staff is one of the best ways to welcome everyone—and a great place to start building an inclusive culture.



Regan Linton. Photo by Bonni Allen Photography

“There’s still a lot of stigma around disability, and narratives that paint disability as problematic, and unattractive. Too many nondisabled folks assume that people with disabilities can’t do things, rather than assuming they can. People in the field need to be aware of their implicit biases and start challenging them. Institutions need to encourage openness around disability identification, and actively encourage employment of people with disabilities, as well as investment in training, mentoring, and guiding young artists with disabilities.”

Regan Linton
Actor, Director, Writer, Advocate,
former Artistic Director of
Phamaly Theatre Company

The Best Practices for Disability Equity and Inclusion

- Fostering an **inclusive business culture**, starting with expressions of commitment from the highest levels and carried across an organization widely through practices such as disability-focused employee resource groups and engagement activities.
- Ensuring disability-inclusive **outreach & recruitment** by developing relationships with a variety of [recruitment sources](#) to build a pipeline of qualified candidates with disabilities for the future.
- Promoting disability-inclusive **talent acquisition & retention processes** by establishing personnel systems and [job descriptions](#) that facilitate not only the [hiring](#) but also advancement of qualified individuals with disabilities.
- Providing the **accommodations** employees with disabilities may need to do their jobs effectively, whether that means assistive technology, a [flexible schedule](#) including [telework](#) and [remote work](#) options, or numerous other [reasonable accommodations](#) or productivity enhancements.
- Taking steps to ensure **external and internal communication of company policies and practices** around its [commitment to disability inclusion](#) and providing training on disability-related workplace issues to staff.
- Ensuring a barrier-free workplace by maintaining **accessible information and communication technology**, as well as a workplace that is physically and [attitudinally](#) accessible.
- Promoting **accountability & self-identification**, if appropriate, by adopting written policies, practices and procedures, and measuring their effectiveness in order to identify areas for improvement.

Source: EARN's [Disability Inclusion in the Workplace: Why It Matters](#)

Best Practices for Disability Equity

So, what does it take to be an inclusive, disability-friendly employer? The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) outlines the following seven practices, which map to its “Inclusion@Work” Framework for Building a Disability-Inclusive Organization.

Expressing a Commitment to Disability Equity and Inclusion

One of the first steps in making your arts institution more equitable and inclusive is expressing a commitment to doing so. Although this may seem simple in concept, such expressions of commitment have significant impact and should come from the highest levels.

In non-profit cultural institutions (and some for-profit corporations), the governing body (e.g., the board of directors) bears ultimate responsibility and sets the tone for the rest of the organization, and thus must therefore be a champion for disability equity and inclusion. The board is responsible for ensuring that the institution fulfills its mission, providing the public with physical and intellectual access to its offerings and resources. It also works to ensure the institution complies with local, state, and federal laws and codes and regulations applicable to its facilities, operations, and administration. Thus, the board must understand the implications of legislation regarding accessibility for people with disabilities and encourage its institution to adopt inclusive practices to ensure that all opportunities are open to everyone. Further, the director/CEO must ensure that inclusion is not addressed only related to programs and services, but also employment within the institution.

Smart practices in this regard include:

- Ensuring staff and volunteers are knowledgeable about accessibility best practices.
- Appointing a staff member as an [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)/Section 504/Section 508](#) coordinator (or [accessibility coordinator](#)).
- Forming an interdepartmental Access/Accessibility Team to ensure that access and inclusion are considered at every level of the organization.
- Posting notices about your commitment to inclusion and equal opportunity on your public website, and posting news about events and activities that explain the cultural institution's compliance with the Rehabilitation Act and ADA.
- Establishing internal grievance procedures for individuals with disabilities.
- Conducting a self-evaluation of all policies, practices, and programs to ensure that they are equally accessible to people with and without disabilities.
- Incorporating images of disabled artists and patrons with disabilities into your marketing materials to help communicate that disability is part of diversity.

- Inviting creative professionals with disabilities to your events and to serve as competition judges, directors, designers, and mentors and profiling them in your newsletter, magazine, or other communications. In such profiles, the focus should be on their crafts, not their disabilities.

“People with disabilities need places at the table, leading conversations and creating impact. We deserve equality, dignity, and recognition for our value and talents, just like everyone else. That is the true meaning of accessibility.”

Adam Perry
**Director, Camp Jabberwocky/
Former Deputy Director, Arts Midwest**

Inclusive, Equitable and Accessible Arts Workplaces

General accessibility best practices extend to arts *workplaces*—whether the space is an office environment, a recording studio, a performance venue (e.g., backstage, onstage, the orchestra pit, and front of house), an exhibit area, cafeteria, or any other myriad places that make arts institutions tick.

Many employers mistakenly believe that accessibility concerns do not apply to them if they do not currently employ people with disabilities. However, the accessibility of offices, venues, and online systems should always be considered. Such preparation ensures that employers don’t inadvertently discriminate against a future job candidate with a disability or employee with a short-term disability. A disability-inclusive environment also expands your pool of potential volunteers. What’s more, someone in your current workforce can become disabled at any time due to injury or illness. In short, a flexible and accessible workplace should be an ongoing priority for any arts organization.

Assessment and Action

An essential first step toward improving disability equity and inclusion across your organization is to assess the accessibility of your workplace and address any shortcomings. Such assessments should include audits of your organization’s:

- Physical spaces (e.g., venues, exhibit spaces, stage, offices, etc.)
- Programmatic access

- Communications access
- Recruitment and interview/audition procedures
- Employment policies and programs, including internships and other training programs
- Digital technology (e.g., websites, communications platforms, and other workplace technologies)
- Training and professional development activities

Most practices that make arts venues accessible for arts audiences also benefit arts employees, so the NEA publication [“Design for Accessibility: A Cultural Administrator’s Handbook”](#) and the [ADA Standards for Accessible Design](#) can be valuable resources. The National Arts & Disability Center also offers a range of [accessibility resources for arts organizations](#).

In addition, the Cultural Access Network of New Jersey created an [ADA Self-Assessment Survey and Planning Tool](#) to get started on an access plan. For an interesting discussion about the implementation of such a plan, albeit in museum settings, see [“Museums: A Whole New World for Visually Impaired People,”](#) by Barry Ginley.

Another helpful resource is the [NEA Brief Accessibility Checklist](#). While not a comprehensive list of all requirements for cultural organizations, this checklist offers a helpful snapshot of accessibility issues that all organizations should consider, including the following:

Physical access:

- Wheelchair access. This includes ground-level entry, ramped access, and/or elevators to the venue, adequate width, lack of thresholds, lowered counters, as well as barrier-free pathways throughout the venue.
- Removal of any overhanging or protruding objects in paths of travel.
- Automatic doors and accessible door handles.
- Signage at any inaccessible entrances with directions to accessible entrances.
- Integrated and dispersed wheelchair seating in assembly areas.
- Wheelchair-accessible box office, stage, dressing rooms, and design/technical areas including costume and design shops, catwalks, and lighting/sound/stage management booths.
- Wheelchair-accessible display cases, exhibit areas, and counters.
- Wheelchair-accessible restrooms, including accessible sinks, water fountains, and soap and paper dispensers.

- Wheelchair-accessible toilet stall, including a 60" diameter or T-turn clear floor space, free of the door swing.
- Accessible emergency exits and audio/visual emergency alarms.
- Designated accessible parking spaces with adjoining curb cuts, and an accessible route from parking to the venue.

Programmatic/communications access:

- Designated staff member responsible for overseeing accessibility and Section 504/ADA compliance Stated policy or mission statement regarding accessibility.
- An Access Committee that includes people with various disabilities to advise on access issues across the organization.
- Sign language interpretation.
- Scripts and text of verbal presentations.
- Assistive listening systems.
- Open or closed captioning of audio visuals.
- Audio description of visual art, media, performances, or other presentations.
- Print materials in alternate formats, including Braille, computer disk, and large print.
- Large-print labeling with high contrast.
- Accessible website (including alt tags and captioned video).
- Tactile tours.
- TDD, telephone/typewriter.
- Access information/accommodations with appropriate disability symbols included in all publicity (i.e., press releases or programs).
- Staff and volunteers who are knowledgeable about accessibility best practices.

Technology Accessibility

In this day and age, workplace accessibility is not just about the physical environment. Arts employers must also make sure their virtual doors are open, meaning their workplace technology is accessible to all job seekers and employees. Otherwise, they may be missing out on potential talent.

When technology is accessible, it means it can be accessed by people with a wide range of disabilities. As explained by the U.S. Department of Labor-funded [Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology \(PEAT\)](#), technology can be accessible either *directly* or *indirectly*. When technology is

directly accessible, it means an individual can use it without any additional devices or software, interacting with it in the way that best meets their needs. A common example is a smartphone with a built-in screen reader or voice activation features that can assist people with visual disabilities or limited dexterity. When technology is *indirectly* accessible, it means the individual may need an assistive technology device to use it, for example, when someone uses separate screen reading software (such as Job Access With Speech [JAWS]) to navigate an online job application.

To improve the accessibility of your organization's workplace technology, you can make use of tools developed by PEAT. These include the following:

- [PEAT Staff Training Resources](#) help train staff across your organization in the accessibility skills relevant to their specific role.
- [TechCheck](#) helps you assess your workplace technology accessibility practices and find tools to improve them.
- [TalentWorks](#) helps you ensure that online job applications, pre-employment tests, resume upload programs, and other recruitment tools are accessible. After all, you can't hire people with disabilities if they can't access your online job application in the first place!

Ensuring your organization's workplace technology is accessible often has the upside of helping make all employees more productive, as accessibility features are increasingly used by people both with and without disabilities to increase speed and efficiency.

Accessibility and Inclusion Training

Shortcomings in accessibility often stem from simple lack of awareness and communication. That's why it is important to create a conscious employee knowledge base and affirmative communication culture around equity, inclusion, accessibility, and disability issues through employee education and training.

Disability-related workshops and webinars for front-line and back-office staff are always a good idea, and you can make these trainings inclusive and enriching by inviting employees with disabilities to participate (without singling them out). In addition to your administrative staff, be sure

"Every new leader, every new intern, every new volunteer and staff person needs to be educated, trained, encouraged and empowered to take actions that lead to thoughtful and positive access for people with disabilities."

Betty Siegel
Director, Office of Access and VSA
at the John F. Kennedy Center
for the Performing Arts

to include docents, volunteers, ushers, ticket-takers, visitor services staff, educators, security guards, and other staff in these trainings. It is important that everyone across your organization who may meet or work with people with disabilities, internally or externally, understand accessibility issues.

Training sources include the Job Accommodation Network's series of [on-demand online training](#) and the ADA National Network's [training center](#). You can also check out PEAT's list of resources on [disability awareness training](#). For customized in-person training and education, [Centers for Independent Living \(CILs\)](#) may also be helpful to contact. These community-based nonprofit agencies, located in communities across the nation, are run by and for people with disabilities and provide a variety of services, including disability awareness training. In addition, the [Campaign for Disability Employment](#) offers a variety of video public service announcements, posters, and discussion guides to aid in workplace education.

Where to Learn More:

- EARN: [“Inclusion@Work: A Framework for Building a Disability-Inclusive Organization”](#)
- U.S. Department of Labor/Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP): [“Building an Inclusive Workplace”](#)
- Disability:IN (Formerly U.S. Business Leadership Network)/U.S. Chamber of Commerce: [“Leading Practices on Disability Inclusion”](#)
- Centers for Disease Control: [“Communicating with and About People with Disabilities”](#)
- [Small Business Administration - “How to Create an Inclusive Hiring and Workplace Culture at Your Small Business”](#)
- [The Hollywood Disability Toolkit: The RespectAbility Guide to Inclusion in the Entertainment Industry](#)

Finding and Recruiting Artists and Arts Workers with Disabilities

Many employers want to ensure their hiring efforts are disability-inclusive but may not know where to find qualified job candidates with disabilities and how to ensure their hiring and onboarding processes are open and welcoming to all. This section highlights several helpful resources.



Jenn Poret. Photo by Shonda Ranson

“Listen to the people who are applying to the jobs, and more importantly find the people who aren’t applying and ask them why. Then change the process so that those who are qualified but weren’t applying before can. Once you have disabled people in the workforce, listen to them and see how you can make the workplace more comfortable and accommodating. And eventually, inclusion won’t be a word we need to use because it will be the norm.”

Jenn Poret
Client Services Manager,
Hammer Theatre Center

Forming Partnerships

A key strategy for connecting with workers with disabilities is to form partnerships with local recruitment sources. Examples of potential partners that can assist you in meeting your workforce needs and diversifying your talent pool to include people with disabilities include:

- **American Job Centers:** Find your [local American Job Center](#) (AJC) and connect with a Business Services Representatives who can assist you with recruiting, hiring, or training employees, including people with disabilities.
- **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Agencies:** For more information, contact your [state VR agency](#) or the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation [National Employment Team](#) (The NET), which hosts an online resource that can assist with recruiting, called the [Talent Acquisition Portal \(TAP\)](#).

- **Disability:IN** (formerly the U.S. Business Leadership Network): This national nonprofit organization helps businesses achieve disability inclusion in the workplace, supply chain, and marketplace. Your local [Disability:IN affiliate](#) may be able to connect you with candidates and may be especially interested in having an arts organization join its efforts.
- **Workforce Development Boards:** Your state or local [Workforce Development Board](#) can help you find skilled workers, including those with disabilities.
- **Ticket to Work:** The Social Security Administration's [Ticket to Work](#) (TTW) program can connect employers with organizations called [Employment Networks](#), which help businesses find qualified job applicants with disabilities.
- **Centers for Independent Living:** Contact your local [Center for Independent Living](#) (CIL). These organizations often work with local employers interested in hiring qualified workers with disabilities. A growing number of CILs are becoming [Employment Networks](#), which offer many pre-employment services for job seekers as well.
- **Governors' Committees on the Employment of People with Disabilities:** [These state offices](#) work to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities and to promote public awareness of the needs and abilities of people with disabilities.
- **Online Job Boards:** Consider posting your job openings on online job boards used by people with disabilities. The [Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion](#) (EARN) offers a [list of online job posting boards](#).
- **Arts-based Job Boards:** Many arts service organizations host job boards and other ways to connect job opportunities and employees. Examples include the [Americans for the Arts Job Bank](#), the [American Alliance of Museums career resources](#) web page, the [League of American Orchestras Jobs Center](#), and [Dance/USA's directory of jobs and other opportunities](#).
- **State Arts Agencies and Regional Arts Organizations:** Many [state arts agencies and regional arts organizations](#) have job boards of their own.
- **Apprenticeship Programs:** [Registered Apprenticeship](#) programs are an excellent way to build your talent pipeline. [State Apprenticeship Agencies](#) can help connect job seekers looking to learn new skills with employers and sponsors looking for qualified workers, including those with disabilities. The Partnership on Inclusive Apprenticeships has a [helpful guide for recruiting and training apprentices with disabilities](#).
- **Veterans Employment Centers:** Register with the [Veterans Employment Center](#) to express your commitment to hiring a veteran. It connects veterans and their families with meaningful employment and career

development opportunities. You can also explore these [resources on recruiting, hiring, and retaining veterans](#).

- **University Sources:** Your local college or university's Office of Disability Student Services may be able to connect you to students with disabilities in various fields of study—including the arts.

Using Social Media

Increasingly, social media is an effective way to reach job seekers with disabilities. Consider posting job openings on Facebook or joining LinkedIn groups such as “Disability Student Services Professionals,” “Diversity and Disability@Work,” and “Professionals with Disabilities” to engage with job seekers with disabilities. Also, seek out social media pages for local disability advocacy and affinity groups, organizations, and individual artists, many of whom have robust personal networks.

Tip: When using social media, for recruitment or any purpose, remember to make posts accessible by providing descriptive alternative text for images, writing in plain language, using “camel case” capitalization in long hashtags (e.g., #CareersInTheArts versus #careersinthearts), and more. The Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology offers [tips on social media accessibility](#).)

Recruiting Disabled Veterans

When disabled veterans pursue a career in the arts, arts organizations stand to benefit. This population represents a pool of skilled individuals with a proven track record of working both independently and as part of a team, which are highly prized skills in any organization, including, of course, arts organizations.

Employers interested in targeting disabled veterans may benefit from reaching out to one or more of the following programs and resources, which provide arts-related job training and arts experiences to veterans:

- [Creative Forces: NEA Military Healing Arts Network](#)
- [National Initiative for Arts & Health in the Military](#)
- [National Initiative for Arts and Health in the Military's Directory](#)
- [Oklahoma Arts and Military Initiative](#)
- [Art Spark Texas Veteran Services](#)
- [National Veterans Creative Arts Festival](#)
- [Center for American Military Music Opportunities \(CAMMO\) \(cammomusic.org\)](#)

- [United States Veterans' Artists Alliance \(USVAA\)](#)
- [CreatiVets](#)
- [Digital Film Academy Veterans Web Page](#)
- [VetArt](#)

Other Recruitment Tips and Tools

- Partner with local or statewide disability organizations to provide information and support. The Job Accommodation Network offers a listing that can help in finding such organizations.
- Consider spearheading an internship or mentoring program that matches your own employees with aspiring artists and cultural workers with disabilities. In addition to helping youth gain valuable career advice and experience, such programs can help you identify emerging talent you might eventually hire. The U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy's [Inclusive Internship Programs: A How-To Guide for Employers](#) can help.
- EARN has resources to help employers recruit, hire, retain, and advance workers with disabilities. Get information on interview tips, tax incentives, and creating an inclusive work environment.
- There are certain questions you may not ask job applicants regarding their disabilities or medical conditions. For more information, read the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guide: [Questions and Answers: Enforcement Guidance on Disability-Related Inquiries and Medical Examinations of Employees under the Americans with Disabilities Act](#).

"People in the position to hire someone for an entry-level position or those that judge whether someone is capable of doing graduate-level work, must be educated and shown that people with disabilities are able to work in their field.

It's hard to convince some people when they haven't seen someone who is Deaf or blind working in their field. Those networking events have to be accessible to everyone, including those with mobility issues. And when looking for that eager intern to give this 'chance of a lifetime' to work with you, don't limit yourself to people that can work 20-hour days. Endurance or physical strength should never be used to judge someone's dedication or value."

James LeBrecht
Film and Theater Sound Designer
and Filmmaker

Where to Learn More:

- Campaign for Disability Employment: [“Resources for Employers”](#)
- EARN: [“Recruitment and Hiring”](#)
- U.S. Department of Labor/Office of Disability Employment Policy: [“Recruitment and Retention”](#)
- EARN - [When Interviewing a Candidate with a Disability](#)
- [Ensuring Accessible Digital Interviews](#)
- [Job Application/Interview Stage Dos and Don'ts](#)
- [Veterans' Employment and Training Service \(VETS\)](#)
- [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs - Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment \(VR&E\)](#)



AXIS Dance Company in *Alice*. Photo by David DeSilva

Tax Incentives for Employers

There are several [tax incentives](#) that organizations with employees with disabilities may be eligible for, including:

- [The Disabled Access Credit](#)
- [The Work Opportunity Tax Credit](#)
- [State Tax Credits](#)

Some organizations may also qualify for the [Architectural/Transportation Tax Deduction](#) if they take efforts to remove architectural and transportation barriers for people with disabilities and the elderly.

Where to Learn More:

- Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion: [“Tax Incentives Fact Sheet”](#)
- [Job Accommodation Network: “Tax Incentives Topic”](#)



Ceramic piece by
Shawna N.M. Barnes.
Photo courtesy of the artist

Providing Job Accommodations

[Job accommodations](#)—sometimes called “productivity enhancements”—are modifications or adjustments to a job or work environment that enable a qualified person with a disability to apply for or perform a job. When requested, employers covered by the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\) or other disability nondiscrimination laws](#) are required to provide reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities, unless doing so would impose an undue hardship.

“The key is accessibility from cradle to the grave. That means accessible classes, sets, theaters, audition spaces, and studios. The arts need to do away with the practice of having non-disabled people telling disabled stories. Disabled people need to be included on stage and behind-the-scenes. Gatekeepers need to understand that accommodations are not an unfair advantage and that disability is linked with poverty. Working for free to break in is a luxury too many disabled people simply don’t have.”

Maysoon Zayid
Comedian, Writer, Disability Advocate, Princeton Fellow

Just a few examples of common accommodations for workers in all industries include:

- Adjustable desks for employees who use wheelchairs
- Screen reading software for employees with vision disabilities
- Job coaching for employees with intellectual disabilities
- Telecommuting and flexible work schedules for workers managing chronic illness or returning to work after injury

It is important to understand that accommodations are individual in nature, based on each person’s unique needs. In this way, they may require creative thinking on the part of both employee and employer, something that often comes naturally to those in the arts field. In fact, some disabled artists provide an *access statement*, to facilitate better communication about their needs and preferences.

Examples of accommodations for artists might include:

- Accessible studio spaces for disabled artists, actors, dancers, and musicians
- Assistance in transporting work to an exhibition space

- Longer timelines for exhibitions or submitting applications
- Allowing time for blind or low-vision actors to familiarize themselves with the layout of the rehearsal room, stage, and set prior to beginning work
- Sign language interpreters for auditions, rehearsals, and time on set, and captioned videos for Deaf actors
- Allowing breaks during auditions or rehearsals as necessary for health needs

Many accommodations are non-tangible in nature and/or may not even incur a cost. In fact, according to the [Job Accommodation Network](#) (JAN), half of all job accommodations cost employers nothing. Of those that do have a cost, the typical one-time expenditure is \$500.

Because it is the applicant's or employee's responsibility to request an accommodation, it is essential that information about how to request them is communicated effectively, for instance, in casting calls or audition announcements, or during orientation once someone is on the job.

Transportation Considerations

In addition to accommodations, for people with disabilities, accessible transportation can be a crucial employment support. After all, people can't succeed at work if they can't *get* to work. From adapted vehicles to ride-sharing to public transportation, there are numerous transportation options and solutions for people with disabilities, but they vary based on location.

Employers have a key role to play on this front. Be sure to talk with employees or prospective employees with disabilities about their transportation needs, and any transportation benefits/offerings you might offer. You can also direct them to the [Transportation Considerations for People with Disabilities](#) section of this toolkit for links to specific resources that might assist them.

Often, the key to tackling transportation barriers and ensuring access for all is collaboration between businesses, organizations, individuals, and local government. For instance, in New York, the Brooklyn Museum's commitment to welcoming employees and visitors with disabilities was part of the reason a new, accessible subway station was built near the museum.

Where to Find Help with Job Accommodations

The [Job Accommodation Network](#) (JAN) is the leading source of free, expert, and confidential [guidance](#) on workplace accommodations and disability

employment issues, including employment laws and regulations, and it stands at the ready to help employers, including arts employers. You can access JAN's website, or contact it directly, to:

- Find information on [reasonable accommodations](#) for employees with all types of disabilities, including [mental health](#) disabilities and other invisible disabilities.
- Talk to an expert for one-on-one confidential guidance. Call 1-800-526-7234 (voice) or TTY: 1-877-781-9403.

Where to Learn More:

- JAN: [“Low Cost, High Impact” Study](#)
- JAN: [“Employers’ Practical Guide to Reasonable Accommodation Under the ADA”](#)
- Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion: [“Reasonable Accommodations”](#)
- Office of Disability Employment Policy: [“Accommodations”](#)
- LD Online: [“Tips for Self-Advocacy in the Workplace”](#)

Disability Nondiscrimination Laws

It is important for all employers, including arts employers, to understand the laws and regulations that protect the employment rights of people with disabilities. Among these are:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The ADA, specifically its [Title I](#), prohibits [discrimination](#) against qualified job applicants or employees with disabilities.

It covers areas such as:

- [Job application procedures](#)
- Hiring and firing
- Promotions
- Wages and compensation
- Job training
- [Questions employers can and cannot](#) ask about disability or medical condition during an interview and what pre-employment medical tests employers can require job applicants to take

One of the key aspects of Title I is the legal requirement to provide [reasonable accommodations](#) for [employees](#) and job seekers with disabilities.

Title I also prohibits employers from [retaliating](#) against someone who objects to employment practices that discriminate based on disability, or for filing a discrimination charge under the ADA. This section of the ADA is enforced by the [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) (EEOC), and it applies to employers with 15 or more employees and state and local governments regardless of how many employees they have.

The Rehabilitation Act

Several sections of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, impact employment, whether in the arts or other fields. These include (in order of relevance to the arts):

- **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act**
[Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act](#) prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities by any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance, such as a grant from the NEA, National Endowment for the Humanities, or Institute of Museum and Library Services. This protection applies to qualified individuals with disabilities

who participate in such programs or activities, as well as to job and employees of the organizations that provide them, regardless of how many people they employ.

- **Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act**
Some arts organizations may also be covered by [Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act](#), which prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities by federal contractors, meaning companies that do business with the federal government. It also requires some federal contractors to take affirmative action, meaning proactive steps, to recruit and retain disabled workers. Whether or not an arts organization is covered by these additional requirements depends on the type and dollar value of federal contract(s) or subcontract(s) they have and number of people they employ.
- **Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act**
[Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act](#) prohibits employment discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities in the federal sector, including the U.S. Postal Service, the Postal Regulatory Commission, and the Smithsonian Institution. It also requires federal agencies to take affirmative action, meaning proactive steps, to recruit and retain individuals with disabilities.
- **Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act**
[Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act](#) requires federal agencies to ensure their information technology and online activities are accessible to people with disabilities, both externally, such as websites and online systems; and internally, including systems related to payroll, travel, and benefits, etc. Section 508 only covers federal employers, but many private employers use its standards to ensure their virtual infrastructure is accessible.

Where to Learn More:

- U.S. Department of Labor: [“Disability Nondiscrimination Law elaws Advisor”](#)
- U.S. Department of Labor: [“Medical- and Disability-Related Leave elaws Advisor”](#)
- U.S. Department of Labor/Office of Disability Employment Policy: [“Americans with Disabilities Act”](#)
- U.S. Department of Labor/Office of Disability Employment Policy: [“Federal Contractor Requirements”](#)