

## Introduction to Access

Providing inclusive and appropriate access to collections, exhibitions and resources is one of the primary goals of a museum or gallery. It is common for organisations to focus on the physical aspects of access - getting into and moving around the building - and not realise that barriers to access can be much broader. Improving access across a wide range of issues will create a more welcoming environment and lead to greater and more diverse visitation.

Barriers to access can be divided into the following broad categories:

- **Physical and sensory:** Physical issues to be considered are the needs of those in wheelchairs, with prams or walking frames, the elderly and the frail. Sensory issues relate to visual and acoustic elements, keeping in mind both those who are visually or aurally impaired and conversely the possibility of visual or acoustic overload.
- **Cultural:** An awareness of the needs and sensitivities of the diverse cultural groups which make up our communities can only improve the experience of visitors but will lead to more inclusive approaches to collecting and exhibiting.
- **Social:** Museums and galleries can be unwelcoming or irrelevant to many groups in the community if they ignore the needs of those outside the financial, educational or age brackets identified as the “typical visitor”. The choice of exhibition topic, the types of items collected and the manner of working is crucial to including all groups as potential visitors.
- **Intellectual:** Complicated language and design used on labels and signage can prevent people with intellectual disabilities from engaging with a museum or gallery. Providing a range of ways that visitors can engage with your exhibitions will satisfy their varied needs.
- **Attitudinal:** Providing a welcoming and safe environment is a key component to developing a continued engagement with the community. A friendly and open attitude should be conveyed by the staff and facilities at reception and throughout the exhibition areas and should also be extended to donors, researchers and any others who engage with the organisation.
- **Financial:** Developing mechanisms for equitable charges for entry and program attendance can broaden the type of visitor coming to your organisation.

## Physical and Sensory

<b>Museum and Gallery Considerations</b>	<b>Possible solutions</b>
Public transport and parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find out the nearest public transport to your location and what sort of disabled access they provide.</li> <li>• Provide information in brochures and website including types of public transport, general hours of operation, timing between services and distance from the transport stop to your site. Mention if it is a flat route or not.</li> <li>• Provide information about parking on site or nearby including any associated costs or disability parking spaces and the distance to the entrance.</li> </ul>
Entrance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the entrance is easy to locate through appropriate signage or visibility.</li> <li>• Include information about disabled access on entrance signage, on website and in brochures.</li> <li>• If there are steps consider fitting in a ramp or providing an alternatic entrance for people with physical disabilities.</li> </ul>
Signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use large, clear fonts.</li> <li>• Where possible position signage at eye level.</li> <li>• Consider printing large versions of material by making enlarged version on a photocopier</li> </ul>
Access to upper floors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Installing lifts can be expensive however it's possible to "bring the upstairs down" by:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Providing large format photos of the rooms.</li> <li>○ Bringing some small exhibition items down for visitors.</li> <li>○ Developing a video or interactive about the rooms.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Circulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This can be difficult when there are a number of small rooms such as in a house museum.</li> <li>• In larger settings you may need to consider rest spots.</li> <li>• Ensure there are clear paths for visitors to move through spaces.</li> <li>• Consider how wheelchairs, prams and walking frames are able to move through spaces. If there are tight areas you may need to have photographs of exhibits or staff who can bring small items to visitors</li> </ul>
Multimedia exhibitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide transcripts or text descriptions of recordings</li> <li>• Provide audio description of visual material</li> <li>• Talk to organisations such as Technical Aids for the Disabled about the preparation of multimedia material for people with disabilities.</li> <li>• <a href="http://www.tadnsw.org.au/index.html">http://www.tadnsw.org.au/index.html</a></li> </ul>
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Websites and email can be useful in assisting visitors in preparing for a visit to your museum/gallery.</li> <li>• Websites can also be used by those who do not have the means to visit your gallery in person. Including pictures and articles on past, current and upcoming exhibitions can be another way of sharing your exhibitions with a wider audience. In particular this can be of great use to students.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that your website is accessible by complying with the W3C guidelines.</li> <li>• <a href="http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG10/">http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG10/</a></li> </ul>
Public facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disabled toilets and facilities for carers with young children such as a change table or a quiet space to feed a baby will make your museum or gallery more accessible.</li> <li>• For smaller museums this may be difficult to provide on site but nearby facilities should be considered.</li> </ul>

## Cultural

<b>Museum and Gallery considerations</b>	<b>Possible solutions</b>
Locally Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and Indigenous community representation in collections and exhibitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite representatives from these communities to join boards, exhibition teams, collection committees and organizational committees.</li> <li>• Ask the community for feedback on the development of collection and exhibition policies.</li> <li>• Invite specific local communities to develop exhibitions that can inform the broader community.</li> <li>• Ask community representatives to identify significant material within the collection and suggestions for other collecting areas.</li> <li>• Provide special days for community access to collections.</li> </ul>
Locally Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and Indigenous participation in programs and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite representatives from these communities to join program development teams.</li> <li>• Hold lunches/evening sessions where representatives of communities can suggest the type of events that would interest their community.</li> <li>• Include key representatives or organisations from communities in invitations to openings and programs. Remember people will feel more comfortable coming if they know other people attending.</li> <li>• Invite representatives from communities to run public programs or other events in your space.</li> </ul>
Care of sacred and secret sacred collections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approach key representatives from local Indigenous communities for guidance.</li> <li>• Museums Australia's documents "Previous Possessions, New Obligations" and "Continuous Cultures Ongoing Responsibilities" provide guidance for managing this process.</li> </ul> <p><a href="http://archive.amol.org.au/craft/omjournal/volume3/dolan.pdf">http://archive.amol.org.au/craft/omjournal/volume3/dolan.pdf</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/dbdoc/ccor_final_feb_05.pdf">http://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/dbdoc/ccor_final_feb_05.pdf</a></p>
Community and cultural protocols (such as	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approach key representatives from the community to develop guidelines for each group.</li> <li>• Where appropriate identify representatives who can carry out</li> </ul>

Indigenous Welcome to Country)	important cultural ceremonies or events such as Welcome to Country.
International Visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the type of international visitors who come to your community.</li> <li>If there are key language groups, look at providing an information sheet about your organization in that/those language/s.</li> <li>Professional translation is available but can be costly. Consider if there is someone in your local community who can assist you such as a language teacher at the local high school/TAFE/University or local CALD community members.</li> </ul>

## Social

<b>Museum and Gallery considerations</b>	<b>Possible solutions</b>
Broad representation across financial, educational and age brackets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work towards developing boards, exhibition teams, collection committees and organisational committees that are representative of the demographics of your community.</li> <li>Invite different groups within your community to develop exhibitions that represent their interests.</li> </ul>
Expectation of the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hold general information sessions at different times of day to let people know about your activities</li> <li>Go to different social meeting places in the community (such as pubs, clubs or the local library) and ask people what they would like to see the museum or gallery doing.</li> </ul>
Role of the museum or gallery within the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Often museums and galleries have a role within the community providing research and information about the region and a venue for local exhibitions, traveling exhibitions, and a meeting place. Museums and Galleries can also fulfill the functions of a: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specialist library.</li> <li>Venue for public occasions (such as weddings, celebrations).</li> <li>Meeting place for reconciliation.</li> <li>Community performance space.</li> <li>Internet access site.</li> <li>Local archiving facility.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Broader collaborations with the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify other organizations within your community who may be interested in collaborating on projects including exhibitions, community festivals, publications etc. or who may be interested in sharing facilities, equipment, skills and expertise.</li> </ul>

## Intellectual

<b>Museum and</b>	<b>Possible solutions</b>
-------------------	---------------------------

<b>Gallery considerations</b>	
Understanding labels, contextual panels and publications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use plain English and a clear font.</li> <li>• Use a variety of communication styles such as images or symbols but do not let this overwhelm the overall message.</li> </ul>
Orientation around the site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clear information about the location of key points on your site such as toilets, exhibitions, shop, with text, images and/or symbols.</li> </ul>
Learning styles and needs of users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider providing different entry points for different interests.</li> <li>• Organise focused events for specialists or a specialist brochure/information sheet</li> </ul>
Need for independent learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Layer information so that users can be directed to sources of further information rather than overwhelming information sheets</li> </ul>

## Attitudinal

<b>Museum and Gallery considerations</b>	<b>Possible solutions</b>
Entrance and visitor information area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clear signage at the entrance to the building</li> <li>• Locate a desk/welcome area at the entrance point that will allow groups to gather or encourage them to ask questions.</li> </ul>
Visitor friendly approach from all people associated with the museum or gallery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure all staff, paid or volunteer, have been informed about cross cultural and social issues and are aware of the organisation's policies towards the community.</li> <li>• Staff should strive to be approachable and friendly towards all visitors.</li> </ul>
Openness to involvement of all people within the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop policies and provide training and opportunities for discussion about cross cultural and social issues.</li> </ul>
Clean, cared for and safe premises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop cleaning and maintenance procedures.</li> <li>• Encourage staff and volunteers to identify maintenance issues and respond to them where appropriate.</li> </ul>

## Financial

<b>Museum and Gallery considerations</b>	<b>Possible solutions</b>
Admission charges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider changing admission charge to donation.</li> <li>• Consider charging different rates for different visitors including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Free admission for carers.</li> <li>○ Family or group or multiple visit discounts.</li> <li>○ Student, pensioner or seniors card discounts.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Charges for other services, workshops, events or membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider providing a limited number of bursaries to special events.</li> </ul>
Access for disadvantaged schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School excursions are becoming cost prohibitive for some schools. Consider free entry or identify appropriate material within the collection that could be developed into a “museum in a box” or “traveling gallery” project that could be taken by a staff member or volunteer to the schools as part of an outreach program.</li> </ul>

© Museums and Galleries NSW, April 2007