



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 quite common for organisations to focus on the physical aspects of access – getting into and moving around the building – and not realise how much broader barriers to access can be.

Improving access across a broad 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

Considerations include the needs of those using wheelchairs, parents with prams, as well as elderly and frail people. The major sensory issues are those related to visual and hearing impairment and should consider not simply the size of print or the level of sounds but also visual or acoustic “overload.”

Cultural

An awareness of the needs and sensitivities of the diverse cultural groups which make up our communities can not only improve the experience of visitors but will lead to more inclusive approaches to collecting and exhibiting.

Social

Museums and galleries can become unwelcoming and 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 and should include not only the people and facilities at the reception area and in exhibitions but approaches to donors, researchers and others who engage with your organisation.

Financial

While organisations need an income in order to function, developing mechanisms for equitable charges for entry and program attendance can broaden the type of visitor coming to your organisation.

Physical and sensory

Museum and Gallery considerations	Possible solutions
Public transport and vehicle access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out the nearest public transport stop to your location and what sort of disabled access they provide • Provide information in brochures and on your website including type 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) • Provide information about car parking on site or nearby including any associated costs, disability car parking spaces and the distance to the entrance
Entrance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the entrance is easy to locate through appropriate signage etc. • Include information about disabled access in entrance signage, brochures and on your website. In particular, directions for vehicles such as which entrance to use and how close to the entrance vehicles can come • If there are steps, can you fit a ramp or provide an alternative dignified entry point for people with physical disabilities?
Signage including labels and wall panels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use large, clear fonts such as Arial or Helvetica • Where possible position signage at eye level (signs at floor level are difficult to read with bifocal glasses) • Provide large print versions of your labels and interpretive panels. Large print labels can be easily and cheaply produced by photocopying original material at an enlarged size
Access to upper floors	<p>Installing lifts can be expensive however, it's possible to "bring the upstairs down" through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing large format photos of the inaccessible rooms • Bringing some small exhibition items down for visitors (if appropriate – taking into account the condition of the object) • Developing a video or interactive about the inaccessible rooms
Ease of circulation throughout the display space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This can be difficult where there are small rooms such as in a house museum. In larger settings you may need to consider rest spots • Ensure there a clear paths for visitors to move through spaces • Consider how wheelchairs, prams and walking frames are able to move through spaces if you have tight areas you may need to have photos of exhibits or guides who can bring small items to visitors (if appropriate – taking into account the condition of the object)
Multimedia exhibitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide transcripts or text descriptions of recordings • Provide audio description of visual material • Talk to organisations such as Technical Aids for the Disabled https://tadaustralia.org.au/ about the preparation of multimedia material for people with disabilities
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Websites can be useful in assisting visitors in preparing for a visit to your museum/gallery • Ensure that your website is accessible by complying with the international web accessibility guidelines. An introduction to the guidelines can be found here: http://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/accessibility.php • Further information is available through Vision Australia http://www.visionaustralia.org/business-and-professionals/digital-access

Public facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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/gallery more accessible to all. • For some smaller museums this is difficult to provide on-site. If so, consider negotiating with a nearby business or organisation so that you can direct visitors to an appropriate facility
--------------------------	---

Cultural

Museum and Gallery considerations	Possible solutions
Local Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and Indigenous community representation in collections and exhibitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite representatives from these communities to join boards, exhibition teams, collection committees and organisational committees • Ask the community for feedback on the development of collection and exhibition policies • Invite specific local communities to develop exhibitions that can inform the broader community • Ask community representatives to identify significant material within the collection and suggestions for other collecting areas • Provide special days for community access to collections
Local Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and Indigenous participation in programs and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite representatives from these communities to join program development teams • Hold lunches/evening sessions where representatives of communities can suggest the type of events that would interest their community • Include key representatives/organisations from communities in invitations to openings/programs (a good tip is to invite two people from these organisations as people are more likely to attend if they know another delegate/invitee) • Invite representatives from communities to run public programs or other events in your space
Care of sacred and secret sacred collections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach key representatives from local Indigenous communities for guidance • Australian Museums and Galleries Association's "Continuous Cultures Ongoing Responsibilities" and "First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries" (https://amaga.org.au/Web/Web/Resources/Indigenous-Roadmap.aspx) provide guidance for managing this process
Community and cultural protocols (such as Indigenous Welcome to Country)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach key representatives from the community to develop guidelines for each group • Where appropriate identify representatives who can carry out important cultural ceremonies/events such as Welcome to Country
International Visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the type of international visitors who come to your community • If there are key language groups, look at providing an information sheet about your organisation, including information about key collection items in that language/s • While professional translation can be costly, there may be someone in your community who can assist you such as a language teacher at the local high school/TAFE/University, local CALD community members

Social

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

Intellectual

Museum and Gallery considerations	Possible solutions
Understanding labels, contextual panels and publications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use plain English and a clear font • Use a variety of communication styles such as images/symbols to assist in tracking key ideas (but don't let this overwhelm the overall message)
Orientation around the site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clear information about the location of key points on your site (such as toilets, exhibitions, shop etc.) • Images/symbols can assist in orientation
Learning styles and needs of users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide different entry points for different interests • Organise focused events for specialists or a specialist brochure/information sheet
Need for independent learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Layer information so that users can be directed to sources of further information rather than overwhelming information sheets

Attitudinal

Museum and Gallery considerations	Possible solutions
Welcoming entrance and visitor information area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clear signage at the entrance to the building • Locate a desk/welcome area at the entrance point that will allow people to gather or encourage them to ask questions.
Visitor friendly approach from all people associated with the museum/gallery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • Have information at the entrance point about other activities in your immediate vicinity (including public transport timetables, location of toilets, opening hours of other attractions)
Openness to involvement of all people within the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop policies and provide training and opportunities for discussion about cross cultural and social issues
Clean, cared for and safe premises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop cleaning and maintenance rosters • Encourage volunteers to identify maintenance issues and respond to them where appropriate

Financial

Museum and Gallery considerations	Possible solutions
Admission charges	Seriously consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student, pensioner and seniors card discounts • Family and multiple visit discounts • Free admission for carers • Consider changing admission charge to donation
Charges for other services, workshops, events or membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider providing a limited number of bursaries to special events
Access for disadvantaged schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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/volunteer to the schools as part of an outreach program