Accessible Graphic Design
Webinar Transcription

KAT: So we pause to acknowledge the place we exist, connect, and create is the traditional, unsurrendered territory of the Abnaki people, one of 5 Wabanaki nations who have continued an enduring presence with this land. We honor Abnaki ancestors past, present and future, and in the chat box I am putting, sometimes the captions don't match the spelling of some of the things I just said, so I’m putting that in, and I'm also putting a link for if you are looking to learn more about Abnaki culture, art, and history, please visit abnaki-edu.org Great organization to learn more about those things and the abacky folks in our community, and so welcome. We're here. Katie is gonna continue and welcome us more. Katie, you want me to do a verbal description now, or you want me to do it after when we go into the next piece?

KATIE: I'm just getting our slides set, sorry.

KAT: Perfect, no that’s okay.

KATIE: I think now, now is great, Kat. I'm gonna pull up our slides while you do that.

KAT: Perfect. So hi everyone, welcome welcome welcome. I'm Kat Redniss, Katie Miller's here with me. She'll introduce herself. We are both from Inclusive Arts Vermont, and we're so thrilled to be here with you. As Katie said, you'll see some people are posting this in the chat, please feel free to post your name, where you're from, what organization, and just anything you'd like to share in the chat, cameras on or off we're gonna have some interactive pieces. We'd love to see you know your face during that, but also that's a choice point for everybody. So I'm gonna do a verbal description which is an access feature that we include in all of our trainings. Verbal description provides verbal, no, visual information in a verbal way so that folks who can't access that visually can have that. So I am Kat Redniss, I use she/her pronouns. I am a you know a fat pale skinned 40 year old woman, and I have kind of chubby cheeks and platinum blond, wavy messy hair wearing a white t-shirt and I'm sitting in my sunroom. There are black windows letting in light behind me, and the walls have kind of whitewash wood, and the ceiling does as well. And there's little peaks of furniture comin' through, so that's me, welcome everyone.

KATIE: Okay, there we go, sorry. When I share my screen I lose all my controls, and it is my one frustration with Zoom, anyway. Good morning, everybody. Hi! Can folks just give me a thumbs up or a nod or something, if you can see my slides. Okay, Great. I did it. You'd think after two and a half years of this I'd have it under control? Anyway. Good morning. I'm Katie Miller. I'm the Executive Director at Inclusive Arts Vermont. This is the second to last training in our series, with Vermont Arts Council on Digital Accessibility for the inclusion of disabled people. I'm going to start just by doing you know a little verbal description of myself and welcoming you today, talk about the agenda, and then Kat’s gonna take it away.

So I am a pale skin woman in her thirties. I have brown and blonde and silver hair that stays half up and half down. I'm wearing clear rimmed glasses, a gray and white striped shirt and black tank top, and I'm seated in my bedroom, which has grayish blue walls and chunky white trim and you might see some animals come in and out, all three of whom are black. So first I, I also just wanna remind you all of what we tell you every time, which that we're all humans first. Right. So that means take bio breaks as you need them. If you need to be joined by humans, big or small, or animals, that is totally fine. Come as you are, we encourage you to have your cameras on. Our trainings are typically pretty interactive. but if that doesn't feel good to you, leave it off. That's fine, too. You can participate in conversation using the chat box or out loud and questions today can be delivered the same way. Interruptions with questions are totally welcome, I like to let people know that. So don't be afraid to either raise your hand or put a question in the chat box, and we will make sure to answer your questions as they come. We did say this in the beginning, but for those who joined us since we started talking, we are inviting folks to give an introduction in the chat box. You know just who you are and where you're joining us from today, whether or not you have an organization or affiliation. We'd love to know so a brief introduction.
A brief agenda for today: We're gonna start with a moment of reflection. And then we're gonna talk about some shared definitions and just make sure we all have a shared understanding of the language we're going to use. And then we're going to talk about what makes graphic design accessible. We're gonna have some scheduled time for questions. If you wanna save it till then or again interjecting it's totally fine, and then we'll talk about next steps after this. Okay, Kat, take it away.

KAT: Thank you. So we're gonna invite you to participate, and at the end. This is going to be brief, about two minutes. If you want to share, you're welcome to do that or you can just kind of use this as your own process. So we are inviting you to think of a time when you couldn't get the information you needed about an event or program. So a program comes out, there's something that goes out that's introducing it. Think of a time when you couldn't get the information you needed about an event or a program. And we want you to write or draw a reflection. So take a couple of minutes. How did it feel? Did you seek it out, or did it make you choose not to attend? What was the impact of not being able to get that information? So take, we're gonna give you a minute or two of quiet and think about that, and then we'll ask if anybody wants to share at the end.

And take about 30 more seconds if you're writing, if you're drawing, and then if anybody would like to share or reflect on that, share that reflection, that would be great.

All right. Is there anyone who'd like to share their drawing/their reflection, or even just a quick thought about what came to mind with this prompt? And you can share, you can write it in the chat room, you can take your camera off and offer something up and if not that's okay.

ASHLEY: I can share.

KAT: Thanks, Ashley. Go ahead.

ASHLEY: Yeah, my name is Ashley. I use she/her pronouns. I am a pale skinned woman, with brownish hair and hazel eyes. I don't think you can see it, but I'm wearing a gray and white striped shirt, and I'm sitting in my office, in the background is a desk and also a painting on the wall and a fireplace with brick. So I am a massive planner by nature. And so when I can't get the information it makes me incredibly anxious. And it kind of makes me go into research overdrive where I, you know, spend a lot of time trying to get that information in whatever way I can, and usually that includes some of phone calls, or searching the Internet. maybe posting on social media asking if anybody's been to where I need to go to get that information. I do still attend that program or event, but I dramatically change my sort of a, like, arrival time to make sure that I can attain any of that information before the event or program starts. And so it usually results in sort of a bunch of wasted time that I'm, you know, if I get there early, and then you know the information I need didn't necessarily require me to get there extra early, then I'm kind of just sitting around, I don't know what to do now, but.

KATIE: Yeah, thanks, Ashley. This is Katie. I am reminded of a book and podcast episodes and all sorts of things by an author we've talked about before, Rebecca Tossic and if anyone remembers her, she shares this story, I think, in her book it could have been an interview, too. I've read and heard so many of them at the point they all sort of blend together. But she is a wheelchair user, and she was talking about how all of her friends wanted to go out to dinner to celebrate somebody's birthday or something, and they all just picked the restaurant. But it was no big deal but for her to be able to go, she has to do tons of research, which involves calling the restaurant, looking it up on Google Maps and street view and driving by to see it is like the entrance accessible, and how do I get in, and is there accessible parking and all these things, like hours of researchers to be able to go to a dinner with her friends. And for me, how this relates to graphic design is, I can share personal stories. So for those who haven't been to one of our trainings before, I'm the parent to a kiddo with multiple disabilities and we if we're gonna go somewhere, I need to know if it's accessible for her. And oftentimes, if I can't find that information on someone's registration materials, or whatever, and I don't
know who to call, sometimes it means we're not gonna go, which means that organizations are missing out on participants, and, and therefore you know I hate to make it about this but potential revenue. Because people can't find the information they need to participate. So, it's, we like to start with this little thought experiment just so that folks, you know, have that framework of why this stuff even matters. It's not just about graphic design looking pretty, it's about something being designed in a way where everybody can get all the information they need.

KAT: Any other quick thoughts before we move on to the next piece of the agenda? I don't want, if anybody had something burning that they wanted to just share, feel free, either just on mute, or put it in the chat box.

Great, Okay, we'll continue. Thanks so much for sharing that Ashley, and great.

So now we're gonna go on, “what do we mean when we say accessible universal design and graphic design?” That's what the slide says in front of you, there's also a, a banner at the bottom, that goes from purple to a grayish blue, and it's a white slide with black writing. When we're thinking of accessible, we're thinking of two kind of bigger, bigger ways that something can be accessible. First we're thinking about thin in the program, so is the program itself accessible? Is it going to be you know, am I going to be able to access the building? Is there, are there considerations that're making the actual programming accessible. But then the marketing effort itself. And so that is about, you know is the material accessible? Can it be read by screen readers? Does it have information I need? Does it provide what accessibility features are going to be at the event? And often you know we do this with like people we’re partnering with, it's like 1) we need to make sure the program is accessible, and that it's gonna be welcoming to folks that were advertising it too, but then also is the way it's being out there, is it following kind of our protocol call for accessibility? And so that's both physical accessibility, it's also thinking about just the kind of approach to learning, to how materials being developed. And then, in a marketing effort with itself, what you know, how is it being put out in the world? And we're, it in, in our definition right now, accessible means a lot of things, we can talk about, you know, financial accessibility, transportation. We're thinking specifically for people with disabilities. So our access for the time of this talk is about accessibility for people with disabilities.

When we talk about universal design that's, it's, it's not a limitation. It's a challenge, but it's a great challenge and universal design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people, regardless of their age, size, ability, or disability. So that is what we mean when universal design. So that it is not that there's this one ideal human and we're designing for that one ideal human. It's we're thinking about design to think of the beautiful spectrum of identity of experience of humanity who may come and interact with the space, with this program, and we want to create an environment that they can all access as much as possible. And for today's purpose when we're thinking about graphic design, we are talking about static design. So this is, we're not going into an animation or video, we're going to talk today about static design, so really what you're doing what you're putting out on social media, graphic designs, flat designs that aren't, are not going to be moving or anything like that and so those are kind of our overall definitions for where we're going today.

And, wonderful. So this is a big piece. These these are like your, your secret codes that don't have to be secret when you're talking about design. So what is in front of me as a slide that says, “what makes design accessible?” At the right side there is a large question mark, black question mark, in a black circle on a white background. There are all also 10 symbols across that go, and that are different accessibility symbols. And these are symbols that we use on a lot of our marketing to help show what accessibility features are going to be part of a program or event. At minimum, we're going to use, for the most part, the big access question mark, and what that is, is that that is like ‘here's how we are thinking about accessibility, and we, it is on our mind.’ So like what Ashley said, a lot of folks are like, “Well, I had to do my own research, because there was nothing about accessibility in the content or in the, you know, or in the marketing materials that went out.” So this is something that we put on almost all of our marketing materials that says, ‘here's this, it means we're thinking about accessibility.’ And then next to it, what we're also doing is we're putting a contact. And this is, if anything comes out of the series it is something we've probably mentioned almost every time we
have we put this, and it says, here is the contact person for any accessibility requests. And then it also says, here is who to contact, and when you need to contact them by. So it, exactly so, here we go. Katie’s brought this up. It says, “the symbol should always be placed to the left of any text accompanied by the name, phone number and email address of the person to make an accommodation request for.” We always provide both a phone number and an email, because one of those ways may not be accessible to somebody. It should also include the date to make requests by, and you can add text, the details of which services will be provided. It's not necessarily not necessary, particularly if the other symbols are used.

Great, and again, if we're thinking, about design which is both, it's an aesthetic thing, there's this line right here that says it's fine to change color, invert white on a colored background, as long as color is solid and provides high contrast. And this is something that's big, you wouldn't want to blur this, you wouldn't want to put this on top of an image. you wouldn't want to change the accessibility, you want this to be a bold question, mark and there's an example right there that shows, ‘Great This is a way to do it that isn't exactly what we showed you and there we go.’ So it's gonna, we're gonna have ASL and close captioning. If you have other needs, do this right here.

So these are some of the other ones we use. And so you know, for instance, we have, there is, you know, services for folks with, who are blind or have low vision; open captioning; ASL interpretation; the I'm blanking on the name of the phone when–

KATIE: I think it's amplified telephone, it's not really common one anymore, but people do use it.

KAT: Right, right. Exactly so. Right, services for folks who are wheelchair users, audio description, Braille, close captioning, general access symbol, large print, audio description, or assisted listening devices as well. And so these are all things that we'll put, so when we do a project, and you'll see this Katie is going to share some that we've done, when we're doing something, exactly. So this was for, these are–

KATIE: Kat, do you want all of them or just the posters?

KAT: I think just the posters are great. Yeah, just the posters are great. And so these are, for instance, two that we've done. One was a festival, a drumming festival, and then one was our gallery exhibit and it's opening reception. And so if you'll notice, it's, we have in two different ways. The one is at the bottom, here's the General, both of them have the general, here is our question mark, you'll notice we've used two different styles of the question mark, but both of them have the high contrast, for accessibility request contact so and so, here's this, here's this, these are general, these are going over the whole thing. These and then on both of these they also have the additional access features that are built in. So okay, I can look at ‘Boom’ is gonna have assisted listening. It's going to have accommodations for folks who are wheelchair users, there's going to be ASL, large print, braille, and services for folks who are blind or low vision and that might include cited guide, live audio description, there are a variety of things like maybe it would be a touch tour or something like that. And you ‘ANEW’ and so these are two it's as examples, two posters, one for ‘boom,’ one for ‘anew,’ both of them showing that. And it is I think one of the things that's like, this may not be commonplace, and so if you're not putting in all the symbols like there are sometimes we're especially if we're going towards social media versus a poster, we might choose just to use the access symbol, because we're using it for a smaller like for our Instagram, or something like that. We might use something that's smaller because it's going to be on a smaller visual screen. But we wanna make sure that we're having that accessible and those, and those connected contacts for that. And I think Katie has put in the question marks tip sheets in the chat box. So if you want to access those, those are all right there.

This is so. This is, for instance, this is an instagram post that we have right now, and you'll notice at the bottom of it, we have the high contrast. So this is from our Instagram. This is about an artist talk that we have coming up and this is, here's this picture, here's a quote that we're using, at the bottom here is our question mark symbol, access needs contact Heidi, here's Heidi's email, Heidi's phone number, that's how you're gonna do that. And then we're also including in the caption of this, this talk will be captioned, ASL interpreted,
verbally described, and we have, a we have an image description of what's happening on there. So if somebody with a screen reader is utilizing this and they can't see that on there, their screen reader is going to tell them that that's there as well. Awesome.

KATIE: Are there any questions about the access symbols before we move on to something else, about what they are, and how to use them? Okay. Great. While I talk about the next section, I'm actually gonna ask Kat, can you go on the resource page of our website and share the link in the chat? For where to download the accessibility symbols. I think it should be there. Great. Okay.

So we're gonna talk about what else makes design accessible. When you're creating a piece of graphic design, what makes it accessible? First and foremost there is this great thing called the Graphic Design Handbook, or I think it's the Design for Accessibility Handbook, something like that. This document is pretty big, it's about 30 or 40 pages, and goes into a lot more detail with turning and spacing and slanting. And, like all of these different things that we're not going to go into extreme detail today.

But the big 6 are, 1) font choice. You wanna make sure that you're using a font that's 14 or larger, and that's for readability. You also wanna choose something that's sans serif, a sans serif font is one just like the one on the screen. It doesn't have the tails on the ends of the, the letters is the way I would describe it. So it's basically the difference between Times New Roman is a serif font and aerial or Helvetica, something like that is sans serif. So you want to choose something that's 14 or bigger, sans serif, and really readable.

You want to avoid putting pictures behind your text. It was all the rage for a little while in graphic design to have a big picture with text over top of it that was slightly transparent. That is really, really hard for folks to read, and accessibility wise, especially on the web, it's hard for screen readers to make sense of that. Someone who's using screen reader software, which reads the words aloud or reads, like alt text, and basically it reads everything you take in visually on a screen it reads it aloud to the user so it doesn't really know what to say when it gets to a banner of text over an image. And it can be really confusing. So try to avoid that.

Left align in your text really helps with readability and there's actually a really interesting, this isn't so much graphic design, it's, but it's related to marketing. There are a study that just came out about the frequency, or like the length of time people read captions on or text on an Instagram reel or a Tiktok video. And people are much more likely to read the text if it is left aligned, because if it's all center aligned, it's really hard for folks to read. So left aligning your text.

Make sure you keep the contrasts high between colors, meaning it doesn't have to be black and white but you wouldn't want to put yellow on orange, and have that, somebody try to read that. And there is a link, there we go. I'm gonna copy and paste it. The link I'm putting in here right now is a color contrast checker for your website. So you can go to this website, put in any web address, so your own organization's web address and it will check the color contrast for you to make sure it's high enough for people to read, which is pretty great.

Alright, the next thing is using more than just color to indicate importance or hierarchy of something. So a lot of people will have the same thought, but one is black, and one is red, or one is yellow, and one is blue, or something like that. But for people who either have color blindness, or, you know people that just see differently, but they might not pick up on the fact that those colors are different. So you want to use things like bold or not bold, underline. Things like that. Does that sort of make sense for people? Looks like yeah, okay, great. And the last thing I'm going to share is, along with color contrast, is this blog article that I read about why color contrast is important. And it goes into more detail about color blindness, and, and all sorts of things.

Okay, I'm gonna pause for one second and stop my screen sharing and give people the opportunity to ask: Are there any questions so far, or does anybody have like a specific burning thing they've been thinking of before I move on to our next topic? Which is talking about creating documents and Pdfs and such.
KAT: And just a reminder you can do this both with your video or with your audio, or feel free to put things in the chat as well. Either way we will get to them and we'd love to hear from you.

KATIE: Yeah. Okay, great. So the next thing we're gonna talk about is creating accessible PDFs. There is a difference between a, a plain PDF and what's called a readable PDF. And a really easy way to check to see if your document is quote, unquote readable, or not is to bring it up on a computer and try to select the text. If you can't, if you don't get a cursor and you can't select text, the document is not readable. And what that means is for someone with a screen reader user or screen reader software, when they pull up that document their computer's not going to read it to them, it's just going to read them the title of the document, and that's it. They won't read them any of the text that's included in it. So in order to make it readable, if you're scanning a piece of paper into your computer, most scanners have the option to scan readable text. You can also do this. Now, I know iPhone if you use the notes app and you scan there, that can scan readable text. Technology has come a really long way in this regard. And there is a way, if you scan something as not readable or you've received a document that's not readable, to import it into Adobe Acrobat, you have to have actual Acrobat that can convert it to readable. It's not a 100% perfect but it's a good workaround if you need one. I'm going to share a link in the chat right now, a couple links actually. This first one is on creating accessible PDF documents and it's going to go into more detail about things I'm talking about today. And we will email all these links out after as well, so people don't feel like you have to memorize it. And this next one I'm sharing is the accessibility page on Adobe's website itself, and Adobe goes into more detail. There. Okay?

So when you're creating your document, I know that in a Zoom room full of people who do graphic design, this is going to be really painful to hear. But the most, like, guaranteed way if you're making a PDF specifically, to make sure it's gonna be readable and accessible, is to start it at Microsoft Word. Which I know, for those of us who are used to using like InDesign or something it can, it might be painful, but it's the it's the easiest way to do it that I have found personally. You can also, if you, my understanding is that the most accessible of the Adobe suite is to use InDesign, not Photoshop, Illustrator, Canva, which is not an adobe product, but it's the same sort of vein. So Photoshop, Canva and Adobe Illustrator. They all embed text as part of the final image so it's not accessible for somebody who uses a screen reader. And the best options are Word, Powerpoint, or InDesign, I think, is usually a pretty good one, as long as you export it as a PDF. Another option, and I'm going to share my screen in just a minute and walk you through how to do this, but is to run what's called the accessibility checker in adobe Acrobat, and it can walk you through, adding all the things you need like, tags, and image descriptions and all of that stuff. So hang on 1 second while I pull up a document and show you how to do this. Just bear with me.

Okay. So when you are in Adobe Acrobat, there are all of – and this this document I pulled up is the question mark tip sheet from before. So it's a white background of black text, has the question marks in line on the bottom, and the Inclusive Arts logo all the way at the bottom. In Adobe Acrobat all the way on the right hand side, if you don't have this you're gonna want it to show you your toolbar… Oh, mine's not there. Okay, I just updated all of my software so this is why it's not showing it to me. Sorry everybody hang on one second, I don't know why, it's not given’ me all my options here. There we go. Okay, so you can't find it if you go to search tools, and you look for, you just search for access. It'll come up with accessibility check, you're gonna press that button, and it's gonna give you all these options. You're gonna say yes to all of them and then you're gonna click start checking. What this is looking for is, this is pretty simple because there's not a lot to this document. A really long document, it's gonna crunch through it for a couple of minutes. It's looking to make sure that you have readable text, it's looking to make sure that you have image descriptions, and it's looking to make sure that you're using headings, which are not as crucial if there, there's not really a hierarchy, but if I had to pick one, I would say image descriptions and readable texts come before all the rest of it. So on the left hand side of the screen here, if you click three issues, it will tell you what your issues are, and then you can go through and click these, and just fix each issue, and Adobe will walk you through how to fix each issue, which is really cool. This on a really long document can take a very, very long time. But on a one page document it shouldn't take much time at all, especially if it's a simple PDF, and I
recommend doing this before you, you know, upload a document to your website, or send it out into the world in a public way, just to make sure it's as accessible as possible. Okay, any questions about pdfs and anything we've talked about before in terms of graphic design, or any of that stuff?

Okay, The last thing I wanna talk about really quick is Canva. I know that Canva’s become really, really popular with folks. Just either using the raise hand feature or in the chat. Can folks let me know if you use Canva or what, what software you're using for graphic design when you do it for your organization? Even just listing in the chat box is helpful for me, so I know. Canva, InDesign, InDesign… All these Adobe people, this is a beautiful thing. Okay, so people often use Canva for social media posts because it's easy and allows, yes. Okay. So we talked a little bit about how InDesign is a great place to start, largely because it includes that readable text. If you're designing say a social media post in something like Illustrator or Photoshop when you export it, it will not have readable text which, if it's for social media and it's a Jpeg, not a huge issue, but if you're trying to make a Pdf, again, not there. Canva, I've been doing some research and Canva’s accessibility is not great. I do have a couple of links here that I’m going to share. The first one is an article that goes into accessibility with Canva documents. Things like Pdfs out of Canva or presentations. My understanding is that they're working on fixing this but a huge issue is that they weren't exporting things with readable text. So it was just Pdfs that were essentially an image, instead of having readable text on it. And the second one is a webinar by Canva on accessibility within their software, and how to create accessible documents with Canva. It goes into a lot of what we talked about today about what makes a design accessible. So I highly recommend checking out the two of those.

Okay, we had, we had built in a bunch of time for questions at this point. So I'm gonna give one more opportunity for folks either in the chat or out loud. You know if you have any questions at all we're happy to like if somebody on the fly wants to workshop something that they've created, and we can look at it and talk about it together. If somebody's feeling really big, if not I I think we'll wind up ending early today, which is fine.

Izzy asks, “are you able to design Pdfs in canva, and then use Acrobat to make the text readable afterwards?” You totally could. You would create your Pdf in Canva, then save it to your computer. Open it up with Acrobat on the computer and then run that accessibility check. It will sometimes I think that, that's a more, it can get more complicated if it's a really complicated document, and you're trying to add in image descriptions for pictures and stuff, and making sure that the software appropriately tags things as what they are. But it's, it just has a bit of a steep learning curve, but it certainly is a workaround if you want to do it that way. And I don't, a lot of people like canva too, because it has the templates feature, and it has the feature where it can automatically resize something to a different, like you can have one design then it just resizes it for you to like different social media sizes and stuff. Any other questions before we say goodbye today?

Okay, so next steps are per usual. We have office hours next week. That is from 9:30 to 10:30 right here on Zoom. Kat will be here, and I believe that Heidi, our other co-worker, is gonna join Kat, because I will be unavailable that day. But you can feel free to bring any questions at all related to accessibility. It doesn't have to be graphic design and we're just going to hang out, drink coffee, answer questions. You could also, if you have, I'm just thinking in terms of this, often people will walk away and be looking at a design they're working on being like, “actually wait, I have questions about this,” you could bring it to that open hour office hours. They're not recorded. And we could workshop it with you. Kat could run through it with you. Okay. Great. we will send out a link to a survey. if you haven't filled it out already, or you have new thoughts on how we can make this training experience better for all of you, let us know, we're always happy to hear feedback, and unless nobody has any other questions, we will catch you next time. Oh, the, the next one is July. Kat, do you know the date off the top of your head?

KAT: Seventh, I think.

KATIE: July fifth? July fifth.
KAT: Oh, we're June today. Yeah, July fifth.

KATIE: So the next one is July fifth, and that one is sort of the culmination of all of this. Heidi and I are gonna walk folks through how to create an accessibility action plan. So you can come and we'll give you a worksheet and help walk you through it. It’s going to be more of a working session, it’s going to be highly interactive. So come ready to... and yeah all right we'll talk to you soon everybody!