Heidi Swevens: We pause to acknowledge the place we exist, connect and create is the traditional UN surrendered territory of the Abenaki people, one of five Wabanaki nations who have a continued and enduring presence with this land. Present with mountains, vistas, forests. Waters, winds. Presence with people relations awareness that all life is kin. Presence with creativity and culture. Presence with light.

In Abenaki, “waban” refers to the white flickering light in the sky and “aki” is the word for land or the earth. So the Wabanaki are the people of the dawnland. We acknowledge Abenaki ancestors, past present and future. And For more information, you can visit our friends at the Vermont Ave Abenaki Artists Association.

So good morning, my name is Heidi Swevens and I use she, her pronouns, and for access purposes I'll do a visual description. I have blue eyes and pale skin with short brown hair and today I am wearing a teal hoodie sweater with a light blue vest behind me. There is an abstract, colorful rectangular painting that is kind of blurry, but if you see all the colors together at my former rainbow and it’s against a beige colored wall.

I am the director of Community Partnerships at Inclusive Arts, Vermont and what that means in general among all the other details is that if there is an opportunity to connect with community about arts and inclusion and access often invited to the table to see what can be done.

I'm super excited to be here with all of you. Thank you for showing up also I thank you to the Vermont Arts Council for supporting this work on digital access, and now I’m going to pass it over to my colleague and friend Katie Miller.

Katie Miller:

Hi good morning everybody. Like Heidi said, my name is Katie Miller and I will do a quick verbal description of myself and surroundings. I am a very pale skinned woman in her mid 30s. I have at the moment silver hair and black glasses and freckles across my cheeks and I'm wearing a charcoal grey sweater and I'm seated in my bedroom which has Gray blue walls and chunky white trim and there's a potted plant over one shoulder. You might see some animals trickle in and out eventually behind me.

So I just want to start really quickly and go over some, you know, give you some information about how we do our trainings and how we run our zoom spaces because we've gotten feedback that it's a little bit different than the norm. It's not in a bad way, it's just different.

So the first is that I want to remind you all that we are all human beings first and the rest of everything else comes second, third 50th. So if you need to participate by the chat or speaking out loud if you need
to be joined by tiny humans or animals, or you need to get up and use the restroom, please just do whatever it is you need to do and be here as you are today.

Like we welcome all of it.

We you'll notice that Heidi and I did a verbal description of ourself and our surroundings. If you speak today we just welcome you to introduce yourself really quickly. Say maybe your name and the organization you're from and do a quick verbal description of yourself and surroundings if that feels good to you, no pressure. I know it might be new to a lot of you. So, uhm, just welcome you to try it.

On a few other things, we do have captions turned on. In this it's auto captioning, so it's not 100% accurate. Uhm, there will be an updated and accurate transcript after this recording. Speaking of which, we are recording today's session, so for some reason you don't want your image on the screen. Make sure to turn your camera off and this will be shared on the arts council's YouTube channel when we're all done.

Uhm, oh, and the last thing is to please mute yourself when you're not speaking just so we can eliminate background noise. Anybody have any questions about any of that.

So the other thing I want to mention is that we welcome… we look at these all of our trainings, whether they're one hour or 4 hours. As really we want it to be a conversational and interactive space. So if you ever have a question or a comment please. Feel free to put it in the chat box and I'll read it aloud.

Or just, you know, raise your hand, either visually or with the little Emoji thing, and if for some reason I don't see that. Just please help me 'cause sometimes in all of the zoom boxes, it gets lost.

OK.

All right, let's get started you ready, Heidi?

Heidi Swevens:

I am OK.

And so the next part of this time together is an invitation to you. So we're going to talk about disability awareness and ableism. There are degrees in this. There are moving shifting fluid understandings of this and we want to invite your current perspective into the zoom space. Today you won't be asked. To share or you won't be forced to share. But if you can take out a piece of paper and a writing instrument. Or, you know, your digital elements.

We're going to take just a few moments, and I'm going to invite you to write, draw, doodle what comes to your mind and heart when you encounter the word disability. So there's no right or wrong, this is not a test. This is a touchdown.

I think a couple people just entered.

We are doing a reflective moment for those of you who just entered welcome come. You can take a breath, take a pause, but what we're doing now is writing down words, images, phrases, what comes to your mind and heart when you encounter the word disability.

As I mentioned, there's degrees.
There's lots of avenues for this, but we're going to wind down in just a few more breaths, maybe 30 seconds for this part of it, the, the prompt is what comes to your mind and heart when you encounter the word disability.

Take take your time and when you're complete for now, you can just kind of pop up your head or put a thumbs up.

Katie Miller:
Alright, I think people are ready.

Heidi Swevens:
As I mentioned, there isn't a right or a Wrong to this - Is there anybody? Wants to share if that for you helps make something meaningful. Do you want to share either out loud or in the chat box. And Katie will as an access feature, read, read the chat box aloud. The group anyone want to share?

Katie Miller:
Ashley, go ahead.

Ashley:
Sure I wrote down a lot, but I'll share the top two. The first two that came to my mind were very personal, so so my Grand Father has passed away, but when he was alive he couldn't read. UM, he had left school at a young age to help the family out as, as they often did back then, and so he could write his name but nothing else. And so I always would think of him with the disability because he relied on so much everybody around him and people didn't always understand.

Like, well, the menus right on the wall, can't you just pick something there instead of like answering his question? What do you have? And and then my mom is uhm, significantly overweight and has difficult getting into places. She's a walker and it and not only is the physical act of getting into places and trying to figure out if she's going to be comfortable in a seat that's sort of.

Up, but kind of what piggybacks piggyback backs on that, is you know, you know that it it deters her.

You know there's a stigma I guess that she feels around it. There's an embarrassment piece that an added layer of having to figure out things for herself, and it often deters her from going out and enjoying things that I know she would.

Heidi Swevens:
Thanks, Ashley.

Have maybe one more out loud if there's anybody who wants to share and then Katie, I'm curious if there's any in the chat that people have offered.

Len:
I'll share.

I think of when I hear disability.
I think of someone who does has different ways of doing things than I do.

Heidi Swevens:
Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Katie Miller:
There aren't any in the chat.

Heidi Swevens:
OK, and again, this exercise is a question. It's for you. It's one we ask at many trainings. So if you're with us again, you'll probably get asked again and we bring it up to awareness because how you understand disability as part of how you'll hear our presentation of it. And maybe there'll be some things that align, maybe some things that rub up and challenging question, and that's the beauty of learning. And that's the beauty of reciprocity, at least from my.

So often a word that starts with and I'm putting this in air quotes my fingers up, dis is perceived as negative as something that's a problem or a challenge, and there's a lot of of internal work and some systemic work to change that so that disability can be perceived in multiple ways in different ways.

Sort of. Rather than a hierarchy in terms of just this collective, so we're not there and we won't get there in the hour today. But we wanted to start with that to engage your minds and hearts as we share some information with you. Now, does that make sense?

Katie Miller:
Yep, yes head nods

Heidi Swevens:
OK and I have low vision legal blindness. However you want to name it. What that means in this context is it'll often be leaning towards Katie for visual descriptions of what's going on. So I have a sense of not interrupting you after you just put food in your mouth so to speak so if I do that, it's not on purpose.

We try to ordinary up the difference. Is here, but just to be transparent, I have no shame about it. Lots of work with it and Katie and I kind of go back and forth with each other.

These fluid subjective meaning making understandings of disability.

We're going to give you an ADA definition of disability.

The Americans with Disabilities Act was originally enacted in 1990 and later revised in 2008. And so you're going to hear my tone change a little bit disability as defined by the ADA or the Americans with Disabilities Act isn't an individual. Let me say this game. An individual with a disability. Is defined by the Americans With Disabilities Act as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. A person who has a history or record of such an impairment. Or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment. So it's either someone who does have this impairment that limits one or more life activities, major life activities, somebody who has a history or record of that, so it's documented somewhere, or somebody who's perceived by others.
You know. Maybe people in the medical system or the labor system as some way having this impairment. How does that sound or land with people? Make sense? Why does this matter you know, where does this come from in our world?

We have lots of reasons and lots of ways that doing and being and functioning are valued in our society. And also as ways of participating in things like arts and cultural like employment like school. So this definition frames kind of a collective understanding and it kind of weaves its way down into to smaller levels and and and there's different ways of understanding it within models, I'm going to back up a little bit.

I feel like that was confusing.

I apologize so the models of disability are kind of the frameworks that disability has been understood and understood in the history, and we're going to identify three major models or three major areas.

The first is the medical Model and that is where the and I'm putting air quotes. Disability is perceived to be within somebody's body or being or mind. And with that location of the the understanding of disability as internal, there's a sense that there's a problem that there's something that's broken. There's something that needs to be fixed or cured, and there's an individual level of responsibility for that. Sometimes there's you know Ashley mentioned shame that somehow this thing in a body. Is a personal individual choice responsibility, therefore problem. That medical model is used often in defining disability within the Social Security system or in schools with this functionality of the body and mind.

The next model is what's been called a social model of disability. This is sort of really concise and probably not as complex. All of these as the things would show, but the social model says no, no, no disability is connected to the world. Like if you put a ramp. I can get into that building instead of the stairs so that the environment is somehow influencing people's ability to function.

I have low vision. If you put something out loud. If you give it volume I'm able to access that information rather than if you put a menu that's in print in front of me, maybe similar to other people who have different ways of reading and taking in information. So the social model says disability is this interaction between the individual function and the in environment and the barriers that exist in the environment. Barriers being a keyword to address disabilities. Social model. There's accommodations. There's ways of eliminating or mitigating barriers and the third category is way broad.

It's sort of cultural understandings of disability, which these first two I've mentioned or linked directly largely to the Western ways of understanding. There are spiritual and cultural references, understandings, meanings of disability that perceive disability through interdependence, through different. Through Karma and punishment, you know there's all sorts of things within that category.

We won't get into all of those here, but between the social, the medical, the social and cultural models, those three influence individual understandings of disability and experiences of disability and may be part of what you are engaging either within yourself or within the communities that you work in to mitigate the barriers around disability and access.

Does that make sense?

Len:
Really, I have a hard time understanding why cultural differences are considered a disability.

**Heidi Swevens:**

Thank you for that clarification. The cultural differences are not defining the disability, What's a disability or not, but influence how somebody understands the experience that they're having because of the stories, the myths, the contexts, the family origins, that sort of thing that is helpful.

**Len:**

So, so if someone is here from another culture and they have different ways of being queued in different ways of understanding things, you're saying that they have a disability to function in our culture.

**Heidi Swevens:**

No, no, thank you for asking more more deeply what I'm saying is we need to pause before we thinking. We know we think we understand what someone else is experience is because of all these variables that might influence their own understanding and experience and what they. And I'm putting this in air quotes need or don't need.

**Len:**

Yeah alright I'll just watch how that unfolds.

**Katie Miller:**

Yeah, I think one way to look at it if this is helpful is I'm sorry to interject Heidi.

**Heidi Swevens:**

No, it's we're collaborating.

**Katie Miller:**

Yeah, so if you look at it how these different models as as three different ways that different people or systems view disability as a concept… so the cultural one one of the way the examples I give is we were talking to someone recently, over the summer, who was saying, you know, in in my culture and the community I'm from, disability is viewed really differently than in Western culture because you know our our culture is built around, including people and it's less of a I don't want to say big deal, but it's less of a critical issue than it is. You know the inclusion piece, it's just part of what we do. We want to make sure everybody is there, so making accommodations doesn't feel like extra. If that makes sense. So it's it's less about that culture itself can create a disability that it is how cultural experience or your the worldview you have might impact how you view disability.

00:30:53 Speaker 7

Ask question.

00:31:06 Speaker 7

Yeah question.
Go ahead.

Would it be? For example, like for concrete example, would it be like with epilepsy that some cultures would? Uhm view that it’s like a a sacred path to the universe and others would you know, say here 50 years ago… We see it as something where you need to be institutionalized. With shock therapy, would that? Be an example.

Heidi Swevens:

Yeah, this is Heidi. I think what you’re saying is exactly the the context of where cultural influence might be linked to somebody’s experience and and these are 30,000 foot views later as we move through the the content we’re trying to provide the sort of basic level. Uhm, but as we get through to that, it will… We will revisit it in terms of how it might show up in the arts and cultural organizations that you work for in terms of accommodation requests and also meeting people where they are in terms of what it’s like to ask for help or make an accommodation request and have that dialogue back and forth.

Is that is it OK to move on or people?

Still, have you? Know it’s actually understandable to me that there's questions because this is a this is a big topic.

You know it’s not concisely put into words, so I'm grateful that there's questions. But before we move on, I just want to see if there's other things that we need to. Pay attention to within the group.

Katie Miller:

Katie, go ahead.

Katie K:

I noticed that there's a definition for social that you gave us, and a definition for medical that you gave us, not at this moment, but like is it possible that we ultimately can have a definition for the cultural?

Katie Miller:

Great yes.

Katie K:

Thank you.

Katie Miller:

Uh, something he did ask me privately that everything that's in the chat box that I put in there will be part of and included in the transcript. We're going to send out at the end, which you can totally use as notes, so everything we said will be sent to you in text form when this is all done as well. So if you’re a note taker and you need that to learn like, please do.
But if you're taking notes 'cause you're worried that you're going to lose this information somehow, then don't worry, we'll send it all to you. Yeah, OK to move on now.

**Heidi Swevens:**

I'm loving the questions. I'm also aware of time. So the last thing I want to just identify is that disabilities can be visible or invisible. And that is a conversation for a whole other time we'll get to other pieces in the subsequent series. We also have office hours next week, but the reason we identify and name this sort of distinction between things that are visible and invisible. Is because of what was named before, but there's shame.

There's also some assumptions, and until we get to the place in our world where we're not seeing disabilities as negative, we're going to have to be mindful as providers and arts and cultural organizations that visible and invisible disabilities exist, and they impact people's ability to engage with the offerings that we have, and so we need to be responsive to accommodation requests and awarenesses and offerings for both invisible and visible disabilities. And with that, Katie, I'm going to pass it back to.

**Katie Miller:**

Would some examples of invisible versus visible disabilities feel helpful to people? Or does everybody sort of feel like they have a grasp on that?

Yeah, it would be helpful.

OK, so an example of a visible, which could be a physical disability, is something that when you look at someone you can see it might be because they use a mobility aid or UM maybe they have, a cochlear implant or a hearing aid that you can see. It's something that indicates that that person has a disability.

Maybe they're using a service animal or something like that, and an invisible disability is something that you can't outwardly necessarily tell when you look at somebody. Uhm, so that might include. Uhm, chronic pain, learning disabilities, some developmental disabilities. Uh, sensory processing disorders. Anything like that that's that, isn't outwardly apparent when you look at somebody, so that's the distinction between invisible and visible.

And there's a blurry line there, you know, like sometimes the invisible can become visible, or vice versa, you know, and it can shift back and forth. I think about UM someone I know who uses mobility aids in some parts of their life but not others you know and it can shift back and forth between the visible and invisible.

OK, so I'm going to talk about a little bit about ableism and Heidi touched on this briefly, but the whole purpose of today's workshop is really to lay the groundwork on some of these bigger terms and concepts so that when we do the subsequent sessions over the course of the next nine months, people you know you have these. Sort of base knowledge.

So I'm going to talk about ableism. Can folks just raise their hand? Have you heard the term ableism used or you feel like that's something you've heard before, OK so?

Let me pull up my definitions here. So, according to Webster's dictionary, if you look it up, ableism is defined as discrimination in favor of able-bodied people.
So really it's ableism is discrimination against people with disabilities.

There's a definition by someone named Rebecca Tausig which in the links we sent out before this workshop.

Those four links which we'll send to you again. There's a great podcast with a disability rights advocate named Rebecca Tausig, she has a book called Sitting Pretty, which is a a memoir and highly recommended to everybody but her definition of ableism is one of my favorites and I will copy and. Paste this into the chat as well.

Ableism is the process of favoring non disabled body bodies while discriminating those that move, see, hear, process or look differently. The application of this idea can morph into 10,000 shifting shapes and for the world we live in today, it's usually more subtle than overt cruelty, some examples to get us started, the assumption that all those who are deaf would prefer to be hearing. The belief that walking down the aisle at your wedding day is obviously preferable to moving down that aisle in you're in a wheelchair. Parents physically holding their children back as a person with a disability passes by.

The assumption that a non disabled person who chooses a partner with a disability is necessarily brave, strong and especially good.

All of these are different flashes of the same oppressive structure.

Ableism separates isolates assumes it's starved for imagination, curiosity and creativity.

What I like about this definition is it gets the root of Abelson, 'cause I think when you hear discrimination in favor of able bodied people, you think some of those more overt accent. Often it's far more subtle and and the work of unlearning ableist practices or ableist beliefs. It's just like, uh, anti racism work, or any of any anti oppression work it is. A lifelong thing. When we talk about it at the organizational level, so for nonprofits and such, we talk about it as policies and procedures and practices.

But it also involves a level of internal personal work as well. That can be what's the word we use, Heidi? pokey sticky. Uhm, it can feel uncomfortable sometimes. That's OK. It's part of the process and I share this with you because I think once you start to look at it as more subtle you can, you can see it a little bit more. And really, for us, our belief in engaging in this work of you know eradicating ableism is to engage with compassionate curiosity rather than interrogation.

There's this phrase we use because the answer to who done it is all of us, you know, we all have ableist beliefs that are sort of ingrained to us. It's just part of being apart of the society, uhm, and part of unlearning it is recognizing that so. Does anybody have any questions about what ableism is or disability or any of the stuff we've talked about thus far? No OK great uhm.

Now we're going to move into the section of. That's a little bit more actionable. It's less a vocabulary lesson. The vocabulary lesson is very important, but this part is is you're going. To get some steps that you can take away from this today.

Uhm, so while Heidi jumps into that, I am going to copy and paste the definition I just read aloud.

**Heidi Swevens:**

Thank you, thank you Katie the, The Wizard of Tech, one of the Wizards.
I want to reiterate the question – the answer to whodunit is all of us, and I say that because part of this training series is part of our hope is that we provide information and space to feel a little pokey or uncomfortable and ask questions and be in a community where there’s no judgment in a space where all questions are valid where we are all learning and unlearning together may be at different points and places, but that brings richness.

And so that being said, you know this sort of overarching heading of this is what do arts and cultural organizations need to know about disability and access?

And and this was specifically around digital access, because when we went from in person to digital lands, there was a lot of things that improved in terms of people having access just by having the Internet or technology equipment and not needing transportation, and those were all true.

But there are also some other barriers that exist within the digital platform that we want to address and and bring to attention, and you know provide information in collective solutions for or Co creative solutions for so.

One of them is that you know in terms of access as arts and cultural organizations, it's important that we go beyond the physical.

So we've alluded to this and we have other training session topics where we'll go into this, but physical access is important. It's essential, but it's only part of the accessibility picture, so.

It's more than quote getting in the door and and and that's just it's kind of a tenant, you know.

Yeah, if physical access is essential, but it's sort of the foundation and all the other, there's other pieces to does that make sense to people.

Okay. So the next thing that we want to just sort of echo and highlight is that if you build accessibility in from the start. If you can… that's sort of designing for accessibility. Designing for multiple options, designing for different ways of doing. Then that's a really great beginning. In terms of inclusion.

Rather than retrofitting rather than the oops I forgot although oops, I forgot is totally human, but building an accessibility from the start and we'll we'll share some tools with you in this later on in the series that follow.

And in some considerations that we've talked about, but we'll get into our things like American Sign Language interpretation, captioning, verbal description. A tech technology needs sensory needs. Registration, you know from the start, registration and and then also making accommodations.

And I'm going to turn it over to Katie for the making accommodations piece.

**Katie Miller:**

Like Heidi said we're going to have individual trainings on some of the things she just left off, left or listed off like ASL captions and whatnot. But today I want to tell you about one thing you can do. You can leave and do this today. It's free, it won't cost you any money to make your digital stuff. Especially, but all things more accessible to people with disabilities.
I’m going to share my screen. Can everybody see that OK? Great, uhm who here has seen this question mark symbol before? Has anybody seen this symbol?

Yeah, a couple of people, So what this question mark symbol is, is it something you can put on all of your marketing materials and you can download it for free online. I'm going to send you a link to be able to do that. And what this does is this signals to people with disabilities. It's a sort of visual indicator of like.

OK, this is where I go to find out how to make accommodations.

Requests and by including this on your marketing materials on your website, on registration information, anything like that it takes off the emotional labor or the mental load of people having to go to your website.

Find the event.

Is there a contact specialist person listed? Maybe not. Then they have to go to your contact page. Try to guess who the right person and contact to make an accommodation request. It's like that whole process. By the time they're done, they might be like listen this isn't worth it.

I don't actually want to go to this thing anymore, and So what you want to do?

Okay so when you put this question mark you want to put what access features will be present first. What types of accommodation features will already be featured at the event? Are you going to have an ASL interpreter there? Is it as at a physically accessible space? Uhm, if it's digital, will it have captions, will you? Um by doing verbal description or anything like that?

So that's the first part you want to do, and then the next part is you want to say, please make all accommodation requests by a specific date you want.

To make sure you put a date to request by and then a specific person.

It's better to go to a specific person and not a generic info account because then people know it's not going to get lost in the shuffle of some generic. Email that nobody is going to answer and you want to make sure. You have email and phone because some people prefer one over the other.

And the date is important because it gives people a deadline to get you the request so that you have time to try to meet that request. So lining up things like American Sign Language interpreters, professional captioners verbal describers that can take a couple weeks, so my recommendation is to have this date here the the one I listed is March 23rd, 2021, but you just want to have that be 2 weeks out from. Your event if you can't.

What this does is it means that when you market things, you have to start your marketing sooner than you might otherwise, but, uhm, and what I tell people, you know if they call after the date I have listed, they're like, oh it's after the date. Can I still make a request? I was like, yes, you absolutely can. We're going to do everything we can to make this happen. But I might not be able to find an interpreter you know and I just tell people we're going to do our best.

Karen Wolfe:

Katie may ask.
Katie Miller:
Oh yeah, go ahead.

Karen Wolfe:
Hi this is Karen Sharpe wolf. And I was wondering, does this the question mark symbol? Does it show up a certain way for audio descriptions from people who are? How how does that show up?

Katie Miller:
That is a fantastic question so. I'm gonna stop sharing my screen here. Hang on one second… OK, so for what Karen is talking about is for people who come have blindness or low vision. They might use screen reader software. Have people heard of screen readers?

So it it takes everything you see on a computer screen and reads it aloud. But what it's reading aloud is what it's told to read aloud. So it'll read text, but things needed need to be coded in a specific way for it to know what it is so your computer doesn't automatically know that. That's a question mark symbol in a black circle right? Or that it's the accessibility symbol. So you have to put in what's called either alt text or an image description.

We're going to do a whole training on that later, but there is a way to do that in a PDF and and I can, I'm going to make sure to make a note to get that link out to everybody. You can update the image description on word really easily in Adobe pretty easily and on any word press or like WordPress or website editing software.

So the short answer to your question Karen is you have to make sure that you put in the alt text in order for it to know what to read. Otherwise when it's reading it aloud, it'll say it, for example, “Imgfour912qunderscorey.jpg” Like the person who's listening to a screen reader has no idea what that is, but if you put in the alt text or even retile the image, which is like not a great option, but it's a second option to say, “Question mark accessibility symbol.” Then it's there.

On certain social media sites like Facebook, in particular for Facebook events. There's nowhere to upload the symbol to have it sit with all of the text about an event. So what we usually do is we just put the word accessibility in all caps and make it really clear and then put the text underneath that.

Really quickly I just want to tell you about the other accessibility symbols, so I'm going to share a link with all of you. And all these things.

Heidi Swevens:
Might I add something about the question mark?

Can come and I just want to say that the sort of 30,000 foot view we sometimes say if you take nothing else away from a training take this one thing. We say that a lot. So it's kind of a funny ha ha one thing. But the question mark accessibility symbol the the the inquiry about how does this green reader use it?

People in the disability community? People who are looking for accommodations and access that one symbol or the all Caps access says more than here's the person you go to. It says we're aware of accommodations. We want to meet you there. It's sort of a reciprocity of on an organizational
perspective on we care about inclusion, and here's what we're wanting to do. Want to meet you so that question Mark symbol says more than here's the contact information from a user point of view.

It doesn't happen a lot, so the more that it can happen, the more people with disabilities can be invited in with an easy entry point, I think is really important to just reiterate and and not overstate, and if the symbol doesn't get uploaded to the other thing, just accessibility or accommodation requests in all caps.

People on the lookout and listen for that will will. I not everybody as a human, I feel the welcoming in that and and I somehow that changes my experience of something even though it's just in theory, quote justice.

So the other thing that I think is really important and Katie, you might have said this, I just want to say it.

Again, is just because you're asking for accommodation requests doesn't mean you are obligated by law to provide them so that is something that people have expressed hesitation with before. I mean maybe Katie you're going to there, I'm not trying to overstep, but just it doesn't mean that you have to have to provide the accommodation, but you do have to respond. And again, Katie will echo that, so that symbol is huge. It's more than a symbol. It's an entry point and Katie is going to go over the other ones that do specific things.

Guest:

I have a quick question about that. Do you also provide a list where we could go to find people who did those services, like a local list of people who did voicing or interpreting, or you know, I'm I'm just curious if someone sees that – is there a menu of the things they would be looking for and do we have… A list of… In Vermont, where we could contact people who would provide those services. 'cause I would think putting the question mark is one thing, but that second piece is really necessary to be of service to people.

Katie Miller

Yeah, so I'm going to answer that question Teresa, which I think is such a good one. And then Katie, you're up next, OK?

Uh, so. The short answer to question is yes. At the end of this I'm going to share a link to our resources page. And on that resource page on our website is broken down into categories. There's marketing digital events general. There's a section just for teaching artists. There's all sorts of different sections within there. There are links to reserve interpreters. Uh, captioners up all sorts of different stuff.

I think the tricky one is verbal description this, you know, we had a great meeting with someone from the state of Vermont recently, and they're sort of on board with our idea of. Trying to create a referral service for verbal describers like there is for ASL interpreters, because right now that doesn't exist.

There's no central place to call and say, hey, I need a verbal describer. It's sort of you call someone you know who does it, and if they're not available, you call someone they recommend, and so on and so forth until you find someone who is available so. So the short answer is yes.
I'm going to send you that page and on there there's a list. There's also. It's certainly not an exhaustive list, but there's a a pretty long list on there that you can download of different disability service organizations in Vermont that might work with a specific population.

Like if you know you're going to have American Sign Language at an event and you want to make sure that people know that it lists organizations that you might want to talk to help promote the event too, because it goes both ways.

OK, so in terms of what accommodations to put up? I think the most commonly asked for ones are, uhm, American Sign Language, at least in the digital space is what I'm going to focus on right now. American Sign Language captioning. Verbal description.

Are the the three top most common asks the thing about accommodations? Every every person is unique right? And every person has their own needs and they might have needs that look different than other people so.

I always try to make sure if someone is making an accommodation request I try to get as much information as I can from them about what it is they want like, do they have someone in particular they like to work with? Do they have a preferred service for captioning that they feel does a better job? Someone might ask for... Another common one is to send materials ahead of time of the meaning, and if you're gonna if someone asks for something in large print asking them what large print is for.

Them because what one person needs in like 18 point font might be different than the person who wants it in 60 point font. Now, when someone there's a little bit of a legal aspect to this so. When someone makes an accommodation request you are legally obligated to fulfill reasonable requests, and... What is reasonable can get a little squishy, which is why we're going to send you a link.

We recommend if you either don't know what you're obligated to do, or you're trying to figure out if it's possible or you need someone to just talk through and like try to problem solve how to make something accessible. I highly recommend cannot recommend enough calling the New England ADA Center and they're linked here. They it's totally free and it's totally anonymous, so you call them and can say hey I'm I'm having this issue or I I have this. This thing I need to workshop or someone requested X and I can't figure out if it's reasonable or not. Like we, I don't know if we can afford this. Like what do we do? The ADA can help you sort of suss through that and solve it, or problem solve I should.

Again, in a way that's totally free and totally anonymous, and they're more than happy to help. So use them as a resource as much as you can and want to.

**Guest:**

Sorry I just had one more question along this line. Because of the, you know 'cause I would think for us we would be looking at classes rather than events and so that can become, you know, ongoing all year. It's not like two or three events a year, so is there is there grant funding or some kind of funding? Resource to help help organizations fund these, you know, accommodations in any way. Or any resources for that? Accommodation specifically.

**Katie Miller:**

I can't think of any UM, but there are grants available to help make spaces more physically accessible, uhm. We get that question about funding a lot, I think, especially when you start talking about
something like American Sign Language or verbal description or captioning. They're all around the same rate of about $150.00 an hour, which can add up really quickly, and we recognize that, and we know that.

Heidi, can you think of any grants specifically that would support that?

**Heidi Swevens:**

No, I can't think of any grants specifically, I do just want to bring into the conversation around accommodation, sort of a systems level policy piece like building in accessibility from design. Does translate into budgeting for accommodations. It does translate into making space in your overall programming, and I'm not saying that people are doing this or not doing it.

This is not a judgment or a finger pointing at all. It's just as we emerge into you being more aware of accessibility for people with disabilities, it does link to budgets and and that's in classes and programs and hiring in all sorts of elements. Awareness, if not caution, I'll say is that because Individuals historically. Uhm, certainly in in places from my lived experience, I have felt responsible for knowing what the accommodation is and how to do the things. And I have a background in social work so I'm a great coordinator, but what Katie was talking about with you know, kind of the accommodation, the access symbol and all of you are sort of piping in on is like that's a way organizations can share a collective responsibility for accommodation.

But the price part of that gets really tricky really quickly. So if somebody makes a request where there's funding attached to it, I would suggest doing your homework, calling the New England DTA. Reach out to us. We might not have any answers, but we could listen. We might have, you know, somebody connected with us with this grant at that moment, so that the responsibility for paying for something does not get put back on the individual whose way of engaging just happens to cost money that peers may not have. Does that make sense?

Yeah, we're not in the ideal place yet where that doesn't exist like that. The funding is not something we need to consider, but I just encourage you to have a system policy like peer group way of trying to address that so it doesn't feel like a burden to the individual who's asking.

Whether it's money or time or something else. This is part of what we're trying to change in terms of our systems that we just provide multiple options. So that one job, many many lifetimes ago. It was actually an experiential learning work thing through the division for the blind and visually impaired, so I was getting paid a stipend to do this thing and I reached out to a colleague who was like you know, Heidi. I don't have any money and playfully me I was like, well I come with funding you know that is sad on some level that the there was all of this, yes, except for the the cost part of it. You know, so I think. From that lived experience from a long time ago, I just offer it so that we can together begin to shift how we respond to those questions and it's not the individual asking, even though you might say there are people you want to work with or the other things, but it becomes like... How can we do this together?

And it's not an obligation when somebody makes a request like for verbal description, it might not exist, but you do need to respond. You know there is that obligation to respond to say I'll look into it. Thanks for letting me know. Do you have other things to add from a conversational relational piece with the law somewhere behind it. Does that make sense?

**Katie Miller:**
Yeah, people are nodding their heads, Michelle, I see your hand up.

I want to add something really quick that Michelle actually might be about to touch on. But I was recently on a grants panel for the Arts Council and they have a line built into their budgets for that, say that's that's for accessibility. So I would recommend you know you can't do it retroactively necessarily, but you could always go back to a funder and say, hey, can we shift our budget a little bit? And because we're prioritizing accessibility? And I think you would be hard pressed to find a funder that wouldn't be OK with you reallocation some money towards accessibility, but there are. For in the future, going forward is to build it into your applications from the beginning. And say you know, and we are more than happy, if you want to use us as a resource to. Sort of suss out how much that might cost to put in a a budget. But yeah, Michelle, go ahead.

**Michele Bailey:**

Yeah Katie, you did address what I was thinking about just in terms of building it into the budget.

I I'm the ADA coordinator and accessibility coordinator at the Vermont Arts Council. And so we do offer a number of grant programs, and definitely it's looked on very favorably if you include that in your budget and our planning for it. It's it's encouraged and highly recommended, but I would also say that you could apply if you've had a workshop series that say that you were doing over the course of a a year or six months or a couple of months, and you wanted to use those grant funds to support the hiring of an ASL interpreter or other accessibility features that would be, you know, one of our priorities is reaching underserved or under-accessed populations and so that would be that could be a possibility to do something there, so across our programs there's definitely ways that we can help support that and other funders I believe, as well as Heidi and Katie mentioned, that would be an important thing to build into your budget ahead of time.

**Katie Miller:**

Thanks, Michelle. Katie, do you want to ask your question then?

**Katie K.**

Sure, and I'm going to quickly attempt to do the verbal description thing, 'cause I've never done it before, so I'm Katie. Uhm, I have pale skin and shoulder length hair and I'm in the corner of a room that has a grey wall and a stone wall.

**Katie Miller:**

You did great.

**Katie K.:**

So I am just sort of wondering, and I'm almost like maybe we don't spend our time with this, but we have an event that's next week, right? And we it's our annual fundraising event for our family network and we did put in the registration in questions we said do you have any accessibility requests or something I can’t remember how we phrased it. And so I feel like that's a step in the right direction, but not as good as the question mark with the with the resources right there.
Is it ever that that question mark is sort of like a symbol and there aren't the descriptions right next to it? And just to sort of be like a hey where like Heidi was saying, the question mark is a symbol and it's welcoming or...” I mean, I'm sure it's best practice to put the information on the side. But if you have the information elsewhere in your documents can you just get that question mark out there. Is that helpful?

**Katie Miller:**

Yeah, I think this is an interesting one to answer because I think my opinion that I think I know my opinion which is that putting it on there at all is better than not right as long as long as you and like you're using it for the right reasons and the right intention. However, it does have that specific purpose of being a marker of here's where to find the information of how to make an access request, so ideally they should go next to each other. What we've, uh, there's other examples of what we've done, which is, we have the question mark symbol, and then it just list the contact information, but then we have a row of access symbols beneath that which I did link above for like physical access or, uh, Braille. Assisted listening like all sorts of different options, so it sort of gives the information it would otherwise.

So my short answer is you could, but ideally they go next to each other.

Erin had a quick question in the chat box about wondering if there are specific standards for the size of the question mark symbol. Uhm, there is not a standard for the specific size um, in terms of like the symbols themselves, but the the rule I usually give people is I wouldn't go any smaller than 3/4 of an inch if it's on printed materials because you want them to be visible and recognizable for what they are.

**Katie Miller**

So, uhm.

After today it it might not be until tomorrow morning, but at some point today or tomorrow, we're going to send you an email. It has a link to a quick survey. I promise it’s quick. It's like 3 questions long and I really hope you all fill it out because it will help us shape the future trainings in this series. So if you have feedback on today. It's really helpful to let us know so that in in this survey which will be out in multiple.

So please do that. The recording of this training will be available on the Vermont Arts Council's YouTube channel within probably a week or two.

We're going to also have a full transcript of that, as well as a very brief or not very brief, as well as a verbal description, and then the last piece Heidi touched on is next week we're gonna have office hours so next Tuesday morning 9:30 to 10:30 Heidi will be here and I will be here just to answer whatever questions come up for you between now and then. And I'll close by saying what we always say, which is this is not it. It's not like when we log off this zoom screen Heidi and I don’t disappear, please email us or call us. We're happy to answer questions or chat anytime. Hopefully we'll see you all next week. Thank you everybody.

**Heidi Swevens:**

Yeah, thanks so much everybody.

**Katie Miller:**
Really quick, sorry Katie asked. Is it the same link for office hours?

**Katie Miller:**

Yes, it'll be the same link for office hours and the training for the entirety of this series, barring any strange technical difficulties. So hopefully it will stay the same for. The next nine months, yeah.