

SenseAble Guide

The SenseAble Guide is a practical resource for making cultural spaces more inclusive, accessible, and welcoming for people with sensory disabilities. It explores sensory accessibility, Universal Design, Human-Centred Design, digital accessibility, staff training, and visitor feedback, offering clear strategies for museums, theatres, libraries, and cultural venues to create experiences that support autonomy, dignity, and equal participation for everyone.

Muzeul Național
de Istorie a României

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SenseAble Culture

SenseAble Guide

**– Culture for All –
A Comprehensive Guide
to Inclusive Design**

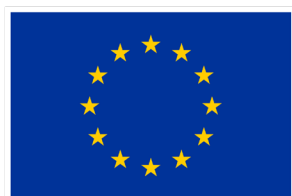


"SenseAble Guide"

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**– Culture for All –
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The project "SenseAble Culture: Empowering Participation of Persons with Sensory Disabilities in Culture"

"SenseAble Culture: Empowering Participation of Persons with Sensory Disabilities in Culture", ref. no. 2025-1-RO01-KA220-ADU-000350475, is a project funded by the European Union through the Erasmus Plus Programme, Cooperation Partnerships in the field of Adult Education (KA220-ADU), with the amount of 120,000 Euros.

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SenseAble Culture is dedicated to empowering Persons with Sensory Disabilities to participate fully and meaningfully in cultural life. We work primarily in rural and underserved areas of Italy, Latvia, Romania, and Spain to help cultural institutions adopt Universal Design and accessibility principles. The project's goal is to transform museums, theatres, art galleries, and libraries into inclusive environments by training professionals and creating practical educational tools.

The objectives of the project are:

- Enhance Institutional Accessibility - Equip cultural workers with the skills to apply Universal Design principles in their daily practices;
- Empower Autonomous Participation - Create environments where People with Sensory Disabilities can contribute directly to decision-

making and enjoy cultural life independently;

- Policy Advocacy - Advocate for the integration of accessibility into long-term European tourism and cultural planning

Through the outputs of the project:

- "Culture for All - A Comprehensive Guide to Inclusive Design" - 8 chapters on sensory accessibility and Universal Design to make your cultural space welcoming for all visitors, including those with disabilities;
- Accessibility Pre-Planning for cultural spaces (Checklist) - an interactive tool to evaluate the venue's access routes, staff skills, and website, then get tailored steps to improve inclusivity step-by-step;
- Online Learning Course: Key Digital and Accessibility Competencies - consisting in complete four flexible modules to boost the skills of cultural workers in digital accessibility and sensory inclusion, earning a digital badge as they learn;
- Toolkit: Downloadable Resources for Accessibility Implementation in cultural spaces - Hands-on materials – like guides for creating multisensory experiences and inclusive itineraries – to apply accessibility principles straight away;
- Guide: Tools for Advocacy and Inclusive Collaboration - actionable strategies to involve persons with disabilities in decision-making and advocate effectively for inclusive cultural projects;
- Policy Briefs for Policymakers - access clear, country-specific recommendations (Romania, Italy, Latvia and Spain) to help integrate accessibility into long-term cultural and tourism planning.

1. Sensory Accessibility

Context

Welcome to the SenseAble Culture Project Guide, which aims to ensure inclusion and accessibility for people in cultural spaces. People with disabilities have the right to access and enjoy art and cultural heritage. However, this is dependent on the accessibility of museums and cultural venues.

In this context, in Chapter 1 we introduce the concept of Sensory accessibility: it is about creating environments and experiences that are perceivable and usable by everyone, regardless of their sensory abilities or differences. To apply this concept, it is essential to understand the methodological approach of **Universal Design** and the principles of the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, which will be explored in more detail later on.

Finally, it is important to distinguish between the definitions "Sensory Accessible" and "Sensory Friendly".

The International Board of Sensory Accessibility defines "Sensory Friendly" as an event that has modified the sensory aspects of an event or production for a specific performance or period of time, for example by reducing the volume, increasing the lighting in the room, and sometimes turning off flashing or strobe lights. However, these types of adaptations do not create permanent inclusion, but rather more unique opportunities.

Creating a "Sensory Accessible" space or event, on the other hand, provides people with an awareness of what an experience entails before they have it, as well as the specific resources they can use. Following the UD approach creates a unique space for all people (with or without disabilities) that is accessible and universal not only at specific times, but permanently over time, respecting each "Sensory World".

As mentioned above, it is important that you understand and know how to apply the principles of Universal Design and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The UN Convention is a binding international treaty, approved by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2006, which aims to ensure that all persons with disabilities enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others. It is an excellent tool for removing barriers and enabling the active participation of PWDs in all decision-making processes, as clearly and precisely stated in **Article 30: "Participation in cultural and recreational life, leisure and sport"**. The article states that: "States Parties recognise the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities: (a) have access to cultural products in accessible formats; [...] (c) have access to cultural venues, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourist services, and, as far as possible, have access to monuments and sites important to national culture".

To ensure full inclusion, it is ineffective to involve people with disabilities late in the process of creating accessible spaces. Accessibility must be defined and co-created together, following the fundamental principle of the global disability rights movement:

"Nothing about us, without us".

Therefore, from the outset, cultural spaces must have characteristics that are universally suitable for anyone interested in going to the theatre, museum, library, etc. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to follow the principles of Universal Design, whose general theme is **"the design of environments that can be used by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for specialised adaptations or designs"**. The concept of UD and its principles will be explained in detail in the following chapters.

In this guide, we want to provide you with knowledge and resources to make **cultural spaces accessible to people with sensory sensitivities, including people who are deaf and hard of hearing, people who are blind, visually impaired, colour blind and neurodivergent people**, through customised solutions. For example, subtitles/Sign Language for the deaf, Braille and audio descriptions for the blind, and adapting environments to reduce overload from intense visual, auditory, tactile, or olfactory stimuli for neurodivergent people.

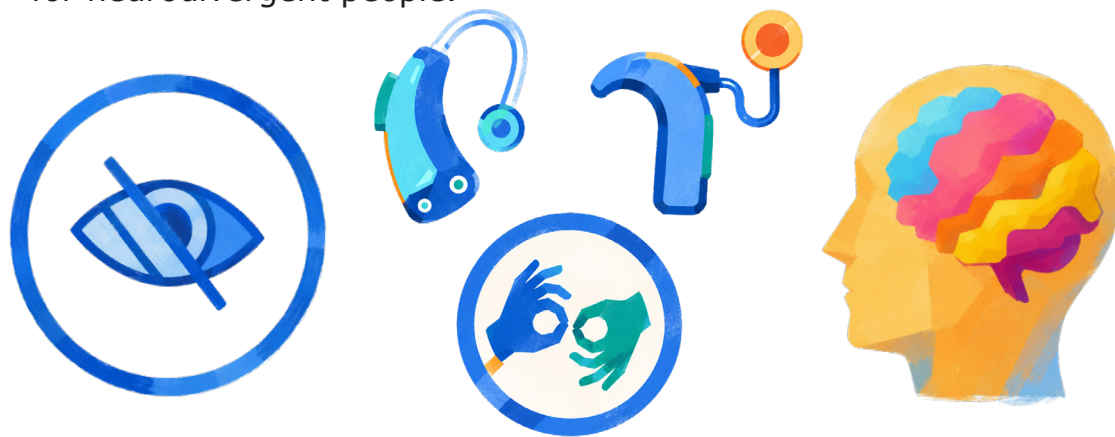


Figure 1. Icons depicting various disabilities (Source: AI-generated image, created by SenseAble Culture project for illustrative purposes, 2026). **Alt text:** A collage of blue icons and a colourful illustration depicting various disabilities: a crossed-out eye for visual impairment, hearing aids and hands communicating in sign language for hearing impairment, and a human silhouette with a colourful brain to represent neurodiversity.

Accessibility always needs to be thought of as a holistic approach (design for all), adapting physical spaces and digital content to make sure anyone who wants to go to an exhibition or a play can do it on their own.

The disabilities mentioned above are also referred to as **invisible disabilities**: physical, mental, sensorial or neurological conditions that are not immediately apparent. It is imperative to recognise invisible disabilities because it reduces stigma and increases understanding.

People with invisible disabilities may be judged or misunderstood by others who do not understand their difficulties.

The international symbol designed to raise awareness is the **Sunflower Lanyard**: a green lanyard with a distinctive sunflower pattern. It can be easily worn around the neck or attached to a bag.

Many people choose to add a sunflower card explaining their specific needs, which can be inserted into a plastic pocket provided with the lanyard. It is very important that you pay attention if a visitor arrives wearing this lanyard, as it indicates that they need greater understanding and the use of support.



Figure 2. Sunflower Lanyard product image (Source: Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme Limited UK, 2026, used for illustrative purposes). **Alt text:** A green lanyard featuring yellow sunflower motifs – the internationally recognized symbol of hidden disabilities – with a transparent plastic badge holder containing a matching identification card displaying the "Hidden Disabilities Sunflower" logo.

Sensory Sensibilities

Sensory accessibility for deaf and blind people relies on the use of alternative channels (touch, hearing, residual vision) and assistive technologies to overcome communication and environmental barriers. It includes the use of Braille, sign language, tactile maps, subtitling, acoustic signals, and colour contrasts.

Sensory accessibility for deaf people in cultural venues involves the use of "DeafSpace" principles, which focus on visual and tactile engagement rather than sound. Key improvements include open, well-lit spaces for clear viewing, visual communication tools, flashing alerts, sign language, captions on all media, and, increasingly, multisensory and interactive exhibits.

Although deaf people rely primarily on visual cues, managing the acoustic environment remains important, especially for those who use cochlear implants and hearing aids.

For blind and visually impaired people, it is essential to use tactile signals: structured paving (tactile paving) to indicate hazards or routes, tactile maps, and tactile pictograms.

For colour blind visitors, it is important to avoid relying exclusively on colour to convey information. Visual materials, maps, captions, and signage should use patterns, symbols, text labels, and strong contrast combinations to ensure clarity and readability.

Neurodivergence often involves different sensory perception, characterised by hypersensitivity (overreaction) or hyposensitivity (reduced response) to visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory stimuli. These alterations can lead to sensory overload,

anxiety, and self-regulatory behaviours. Meltdowns and shutdowns are involuntary responses to extreme sensory or emotional overload in autistic individuals.

A meltdown is an external explosion (screaming, crying, aggressive/self-harming behaviour), while a shutdown is an internal "shutdown" (social withdrawal, silence, inactivity). Both are protective mechanisms against unbearable situations, not tantrums. Furthermore, autistic people have different needs and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. However, there are many ways in which cultural spaces can create a positive experience for visitors.

Sensory Support

There are practical measures you can apply to reduce the risk of sensory overload, meltdowns, or emotional crises in neurodivergent people:

- ▶ **Environmental Adjustments:** minimising loud sounds, bright lights, echoing acoustics, and harsh, flickering lights.
- ▶ **Design Elements:** Creating clear, predictable, and well-organised layouts with sensory-neutral zones.
- ▶ **Sensory Tools:** Providing noise-cancelling headphones, fidget tools, and, weighted lap pads
- ▶ **Operational Adaptations:** Offering dedicated quiet spaces, and "sensory-friendly" hours with limited attendance.
- ▶ **Support & Information:** Provision of sensory maps identifying areas with high stimulation

It is also helpful to implement dedicated time slots, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) materials, and social stories, reducing sensory overload and promoting inclusion.

For neurodivergent visitors, quiet spaces or calm spaces where solutions such as lowering the volume of sound and lights can be provided are necessary in order to benefit from a more relaxed environment. This type of environment can also be ideal for people with sensory and communication disorders.

To ensure accessibility for deaf people, all audiovisual materials should be subtitled, translated into sign language.

In addition, effective orientation within the premises should be facilitated by using clear and well-visible signage: the signage will be wall-mounted, with contrasting colours and a highly legible font in capital letters.

The words can also be overwritten in transparent Braille.

A tactile model of the building has a great impact on all types of visitors, providing a wealth of information to people without disabilities and serving as an orientation tool for people with disabilities.

Using colour-blind-friendly palettes and testing visual materials for accessibility can significantly improve comprehension and autonomy. Where possible, cultural venues may also provide assistive tools to enhance colour perception for visitors who wish to use them, such as **EnChroma glasses**.



Figure 3. Sensory support objects (Source: AI-generated image, created by SenseAble Culture project for illustrative purposes, 2026). **Alt text:** Two common items used for sensory support: on the left, a pair of teal-coloured noise-cancelling headphones with lines indicating sound reduction; on the right, an orange fidget spinner. Both are depicted in a clean, graphic style against a white background.

Implementation Strategies, Solutions and Action Plans

Core Strategy Checklist:

- **Co-design from the outset:** Involve people with disabilities and sensory sensitivities in planning, testing and evaluation processes, applying the principles of Universal Design and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ("Nothing about us, without us").
- **Ensure multi-sensory access to content:** Provide subtitles, sign language interpretation, audio description, Braille, tactile maps and high-contrast visual materials and non colour-dependent communication to guarantee access through alternative sensory channels.

- **Design predictable and flexible environments:** Create clear layouts, sensory-neutral zones, quiet spaces and well-lit spaces; reduce glare, echo, flickering lights and overwhelming sounds.
- **Introduce Sensory Kit:** Provide Sensory Kits available to any visitor who may benefit. They can support focus and relaxation during cognitively and sensory demanding activities and typically include a sensory map, ear defenders, sunglasses, fidget toys, and AAC cards to facilitate communication. Additionally, make assistive tools such as EnChroma glasses available on-site for visitors with colour vision deficiency, allowing enhanced perception of artworks and visual materials.
- **Train staff and adopt inclusive protocols:** Educate teams on invisible disabilities, DeafSpace principles, meltdowns and shutdowns; ensure staff recognise and respect the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower symbol and make lanyards available for visitors who may need them.

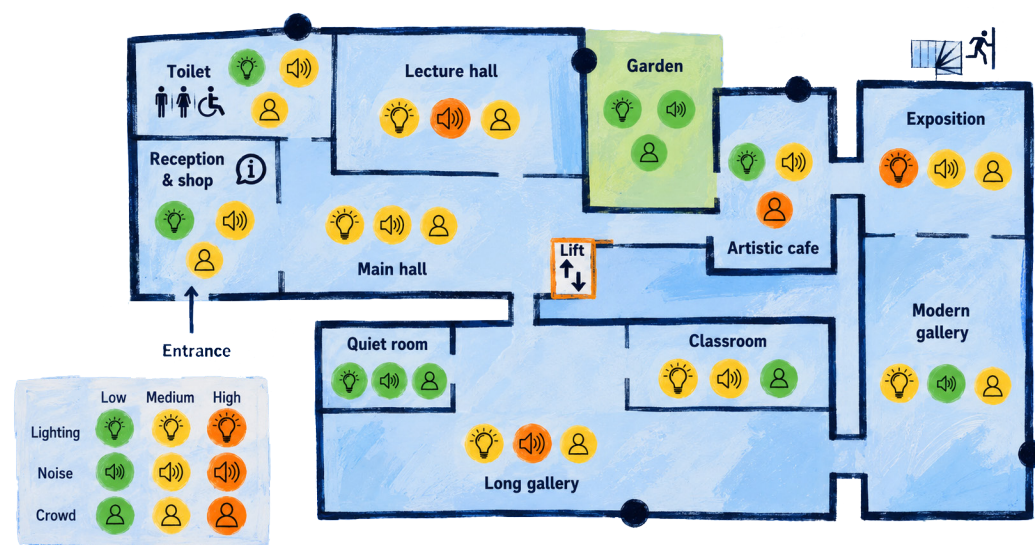


Figure 4. Sensory map indicating the sensory characteristics of different areas (Source: AI-generated image, created by SenseAble Culture project for illustrative purposes, 2026).

Alt text: This map uses a traffic light system to indicate the level of accessibility of different areas. The small green icons indicate highly accessible areas, with few people,

quiet surroundings and soft lighting. The medium-sized yellow icons indicate moderately accessible areas, where light and noise begin to be noticeable and crowds start to build. Finally, the large red icons warn of areas that are not accessible due to excessive chaos, loud noise and glaring lights.

Here is a narrative journey through the spaces:

- **Entrance and Reception:** Upon entering, you find yourself in the Reception area, which has moderate noise levels and a moderate number of people (yellow) and is well lit (green). From here, the Main Hall is accessed on the right, a central space with moderate sensory stimuli (yellow). Immediately on the left are the toilets, which have soft lighting (green), moderate noise levels and a modest number of people (yellow). There is an emergency exit in the toilet. From the Main Hall, the second door on the left leads to the Lecture Hall: there are moderate levels of light and crowding (yellow) and high noise levels (red).
- If you're looking for peace and quiet, to the right of the Main Hall you'll find the Long Gallery, and further to the right is the Quiet Room (Quiet Space), the quietest and most subdued area in the building (all green). The Long Gallery is a larger, rectangular space where the noise level is significantly higher (red) and the lighting and number of people are of moderate intensity (yellow). Opposite the Quiet Room (Quiet Space), turning left as you come from the Main Hall, is the Classroom: here, lighting and noise levels are of medium intensity (yellow) and it is not very crowded (green). There is an emergency exit in the Long Gallery.
- At the end of the Main Hall on the right, after the Long Gallery, there is a lift that takes you to other floors. From the Main Hall, continuing straight ahead, there is a corridor leading to the Artistic Cafe: dim lighting (green), low noise levels (yellow) and potentially very crowded (red). There is an emergency exit in the Artistic Cafe. The Artistic Cafe leads to two different areas.

- If you look at the map to the right of the Artistic Café, you'll see the Garden: it offers a very low-key and relaxing sensory experience (completely green). The Garden is connected to the right by a door leading to the Lecture Hall.
- Looking at the map to the left of the Artistic Cafe, you'll find the Exposition: the lighting is very bright (red), the noise level is the same as in the Artistic Cafe (yellow), but there are fewer people (yellow). Going downstairs, there is another room, the Modern Gallery, connected to the Exposition by doors. In the Modern Gallery, the noise level decreases (green) as does the brightness (yellow), whilst the number of people remains the same (yellow). At the far right of the Modern Gallery, there is an emergency exit; at the far right, there is a corridor connecting it to the Long Gallery.

Some examples:

- **In a Museum:** Offer Sensory Kits at the entrance containing a sensory map to navigate the space, ear defenders to reduce noise, sunglasses to dim bright lights, fidget toys to support self-regulation, and AAC cards to facilitate communication. Combine these with tactile models of artworks and of the building, audio descriptions accessible via QR codes, and clear, high-contrast signage to support autonomous navigation and the possibility to request EnChroma glasses. Staff trained on sensory awareness can recognise the Sunflower Lanyard and offer tailored guidance.
- **In a Theatre:** Provide captioning and sign language interpretation for performances, maintain a calm room available throughout the season, and distribute EnChroma glasses and Sensory Kits including ear defenders and communication cards. Make Sunflower lanyards available at the box office for visitors who wish to discreetly signal additional support needs.



Figure 5. Sensory kit with sensory support tools (Source: AI-generated image, created by SenseAble Culture project for illustrative purposes, 2026). **Alt text:** An infographic showing a blue bag decorated with sunflowers (a symbol of invisible disabilities), with arrows pointing to various sensory support tools: a map, earplugs, sunglasses, a fidget spinner, and colourful communication cards.

Summary

Sensory accessibility requires a structural, long-term commitment grounded in **Universal Design** and the active involvement of people with disabilities from the earliest planning stages. Cultural spaces must move beyond occasional "sensory friendly" adaptations and instead embed permanent, inclusive solutions that guarantee equal participation for all.

Key strategies include ensuring **multi-sensory access** to content (subtitles, sign language, audio description, Braille, tactile maps, high-contrast signage and non colour-dependent communication), designing **predictable and flexible environments** (clear layouts, reduced glare and noise, sensory-neutral zones, calm rooms), and providing **transparent information** in advance through sensory maps and detailed descriptions of stimuli. For **colour blind** visitors, this also means adopting accessible colour palettes, combining colours with symbols and text labels, and avoiding the use of colour as the sole carrier of meaning in exhibitions, maps, and safety information.

Introducing **Sensory Kits** is an effective supportive measure:

available to any visitor, they can include sensory maps, ear defenders, sunglasses, fidget tools, and AAC cards to enhance focus, communication, and self-regulation during cognitively demanding activities. Cultural venues may also provide assistive tools, such as **EnChroma glasses**, to support visitors with colour vision deficiency in experiencing artworks and visual installations more fully.

Equally important is staff training on **invisible disabilities**, DeafSpace principles, and neurodivergent experiences such as meltdowns and shutdowns. Teams should recognise and respect the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower symbol and make lanyards available for visitors who wish to discreetly signal additional support needs. In museums, theatres, and libraries alike, combining environmental design, accessible communication, sensory tools, and informed staff practices transforms spaces into permanently sensory accessible environments, ensuring autonomy, dignity, and full participation in cultural life for everyone.

Glossary

Sign Language

A natural visual-gestural language used by Deaf communities, based on hand movements, facial expressions, body posture, and spatial grammar. Sign languages have their own linguistic structure and are not universal: each country (and sometimes regions within a country) have its own distinct sign language, such as American Sign Language (ASL) or Italian Sign Language (LIS). There is also an International Sign system used mainly at international events and conferences, but it is not a fully standardised language and is not commonly used in everyday communication.

Braille

A tactile reading and writing system used by blind and visually impaired people. It is based on combinations of six raised dots arranged in cells, which represent letters, numbers, punctuation marks, and even musical or mathematical notation. Braille enables independent access to written information in books, signage, labels, and digital displays through refreshable Braille devices.

AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication)

An umbrella term for methods, tools, and strategies that support or replace spoken communication for individuals with speech or language difficulties. AAC can include low-tech solutions such as picture boards and communication books, as well as high-tech devices like speech-generating tablets and specialised software. AAC supports autonomy, participation, and social interaction.

Neurodivergent

A term describing individuals whose neurological development and functioning differ from the dominant societal norm. It includes autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, and other neurodevelopmental variations. Neurodivergence is not inherently negative; it reflects natural variations in how the brain processes information, learns, and interacts with the environment.

Sensory Overload

A state in which the brain receives more sensory input – such as sounds, lights, textures, smells, or visual stimuli – than it can effectively process. This can lead to anxiety, irritability, physical discomfort, difficulty concentrating, or a strong need to escape the environment.

Shutdown

An involuntary internal response to overwhelming sensory or emotional stress. During a shutdown, a person may withdraw socially, become silent, reduce eye contact, or appear unresponsive. It is a protective coping mechanism and should not be mistaken for disinterest or refusal to engage.

Meltdown

An involuntary external reaction to extreme sensory or emotional overload. It may involve crying, shouting, repetitive movements, or loss of behavioural control. A meltdown is not a tantrum or intentional misbehaviour, but a response to an unbearable level of stress.

Colour Blindness (Colour Vision Deficiency)

A visual condition in which a person has difficulty distinguishing certain colours or perceiving differences between them. The most common forms affect red-green perception, while others affect blue-yellow distinctions. Colour blindness does not mean seeing only in black and white; rather, it involves altered colour perception that can impact reading maps, interpreting visual information, or experiencing artworks that rely heavily on colour contrast.

2. Universal Design Principles

Context

An accessible cultural place is not simply a barrier-free area, but an institution that has chosen to question its visitors: how to truly engage them, what it wants to convey to them and how to be available to welcome all.

Universal Design offers a critical lens through which to rethink the visit experience as a whole, shifting attention to reception, spaces, and content. This chapter explores universal principles and their role as the cultural and design foundation of accessibility.

In the introduction, we will explore the seven principles together, trying to underline the fundamental importance of each of them.

In the chapter "Universal Design as a Design Lens" we will try to understand why it is important for design decisions to be guided by the principles of Universal Design.

In the chapter "Universal Design as Cultural Responsibility" we will clarify the concept of the museum/cultural place as a democratic public space.

Finally, in the chapter "Implementation Strategies, Solutions, and Action Plans", we will provide practical recommendations and

examples of good practices related to museum/cultural place accessibility for all.

These contents aim to develop a shared framework for accessibility, with key principles as pillars to be referenced from the outset. It is crucial to reduce exclusion resulting from implicit design choices – choices that unintentionally exclude someone because the design presupposes certain skills, habits, or experiences. The museum/cultural places must consider the diversity of visitors by designing flexibly and consistently.

Universal Design Principles

"Universal Design is the design of products and environments that can be used by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design".

This is the definition of Universal Design used by American architect Ronald L. Mace of North Carolina State University in 1985 when he introduced the concept. For Mace, therefore, Universal Design should aim to create products suitable for the greatest possible number of users, not products created specifically for single experiences. It was necessary to create accessibility that would last into the future.

In 1997, the concept of Universal Design was formalised in seven principles, developed by the designers of the Centre for Universal Design and listed below:

- 1. Equitable use:** The design is useful and marketable for people with different abilities.
- 2. Flexibility of use:** The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

- 3. Simple and intuitive use:** The design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.
- 4. Perceivable information:** The design effectively communicates necessary information to the user, regardless of environmental conditions or the user's sensory capabilities.
- 5. Fault tolerance:** The design minimises the dangers and negative consequences of accidental or unwanted actions.
- 6. Low physical effort:** The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with minimal fatigue.
- 7. Dimensions and space for approach and use:** Adequate size and space are provided for reaching, handling, and use, regardless of the user's body size, posture, or mobility.

We often hear other terms like Design for All and Inclusive Design mistakenly used as synonyms for Universal Design, broadly referring to accessible design. In reality, each has a specific meaning.

The term "Design for All" was developed in 2004 by the European Institute for Design and Disability (EIDD). It is defined as "design for human diversity, social inclusion, and equality" emphasising the social value of design, promoting diversity, equality, and equal opportunities.

"Inclusive Design", on the other hand, was born in Great Britain thanks to Roger Coleman of the Royal College of Art, who introduced it in 1994. It is a design approach aimed at ensuring that products and services meet the needs of the widest possible audience, regardless of age or ability.

The principles of Universal Design, on the other hand, aim to shift

the paradigm, including universal values from the very beginning, thus overcoming special adaptations.

In the early 2000s, another concept was introduced: "Universal Design for Learning", which extended the scope of Universal Design to teaching. By focusing on learning, Universal Design for Learning aims to ensure equal opportunities for all in terms of access to school curricula and textbooks.



Figure 1. Illustration of the word "design" in a dictionary (Source: scyther5, via canva.com, ID: MADGv6z-HIs, accessed March 4th, 2026). **Alt text:** Close-up photograph of the word "design" in a printed dictionary, black text on white paper.

Universal Design as a project lens

Considering Universal Design as a design lens means analysing and structuring a project from the outset, based on the correct criteria that guide the entire design process. In the museum context, the principles of Universal Design do not operate as rules to be applied a posteriori, but as interpretative tools capable of critically interrogating the visitor experience in its complexity. They allow

us to view spaces, content, services, and modes of interaction not as separate elements, but as parts of a system that can foster genuine inclusion.

Used as interpretative criteria, the principles of Universal Design help to make often implicit design choices visible. Each museum, in fact, communicates a specific idea of the visitor through its access methods, the languages used, the length of time spent visiting, and the forms of mediation offered. These choices therefore need to be examined, asking fundamental questions: who is empowered to understand, orient themselves, and participate? Who is left on the margins? In this sense, the principles of Universal Design do not offer ready-made answers, but rather an interpretative framework useful for assessing the inclusive quality of the museum/cultural place experience.

From this perspective, analysing the museum experience means considering the entire visitor journey, from entrance to exit, as a sequence of design decisions that impact autonomy, comfort, and comprehension. It's not just a matter of verifying the presence or absence of barriers, but of observing how information is conveyed, how visitors can move around, pause, explore, or simply experience the space at different times and in different ways, independently. Universal Design becomes a tool for interpreting the visiting experience in its true dimension, made up of behaviours, expectations, and individual differences.

When universal principles are taken as a guide, design decisions become more informed and coherent. Every choice – from exhibition design to content definition, from visual communication to educational services – can be evaluated in relation to the values of fairness, flexibility, simplicity, and dignity that Universal Design

promotes. This approach does not eliminate the complexity of accessible design, but it does provide a common foundation for informed decisions, avoiding fragmented interventions or solutions that address only specific needs without a comprehensive vision.

Coherence and continuity of experience are among the most important aspects of this perspective. A museum/cultural place designed according to Universal Design principles tends to offer a comprehensible and harmonious experience, in which spaces, content, and services interact with each other. A lack of coherence, on the other hand, can lead to disorientation, frustration, and boredom. Universal principles help maintain design continuity, ensuring that the experience doesn't change radically from one environment to another or from one medium to another, but remains comprehensible and accessible throughout the entire journey.

Finally, Universal Design can be understood as a common language capable of connecting the different disciplines involved in museum/cultural place design. Architects, designers, curators, educators, cultural mediators, and communications managers often share similar goals, but use different tools and languages. Universal principles offer a cross-cutting framework that facilitates dialogue, collaboration, and teamwork, allowing design choices to be aligned with shared values. In this sense, Universal Design becomes a cultural tool that fosters more informed, integrated, and visitor-focused design.

Universal Design as a cultural responsibility

Approaching Universal Design in the cultural context means recognising it not just as a design approach, but as a true cultural

responsibility. Museums, art and cultural places, heritage sites play a central role in the construction and transmission of cultural heritage. The ways in which this heritage is made accessible are never neutral: they reflect society's values, priorities, and visions. In this context, Universal Design offers an ethical framework that guides museum decisions towards greater equity and inclusion.

Equity in cultural enjoyment does not mean offering everyone the same experience: it means ensuring each visitor has dignified and adequate conditions to access the museum's content and spaces. Visitor dignity manifests itself in the ability to enjoy the visiting experience without having to ask for help, without feeling excluded or treated as an exception. Universal Design promotes a concept of cultural enjoyment that recognises people's diversity as an integral part of the public, not as a problem to be solved. In this sense, equity becomes a guiding principle that informs the museum's design and communication choices.

A central element of this perspective is visitor autonomy. Being able to choose how to move, what to explore, and how much time to dedicate to a particular content or space. Autonomy isn't just about physical or sensorial access, but also the ability to understand, orient oneself, and participate without constantly depending on the intervention of others. The principles of Universal Design advocate for a design that makes the experience as self-sufficient as possible, strengthening the visitor's sense of control and belonging.

Closely linked to the theme of autonomy is the principle of "non-stigmatisation". Design solutions that clearly distinguish between "standard" users and those with "special needs" risk creating symbolic exclusion, even when they meet accessibility requirements. Universal Design encourages us to overcome this

logic, promoting shared experiences and integrated solutions that do not highlight diversity as an exception. In the museum/cultural place context, this means designing spaces, content, and services that can be used by a variety of visitors without labels or separate paths, contributing to an inclusive and respectful experience.

Inclusion, from this perspective, cannot be considered a marginal objective or an additional intervention, but must become an institutional value. When Universal Design is adopted at a strategic level, it influences the museum's mission, internal policies, staff training, and public relations practices. Accessibility is no longer a requirement to be met, but a principle that guides the institution's organisational culture. This approach helps strengthen the museum's credibility as an open, welcoming place that represents the diversity of contemporary society.

Finally, considering the cultural institution as a democratic public space means recognising everyone's right to cultural participation. Museums are not just places of conservation and exhibition, but spaces for encounter, dialogue, and the construction of shared meaning. Universal Design supports this democratic vision, promoting equitable and widespread access to cultural heritage. In this sense, designing according to universal principles equates to taking a stand for an accessible, plural, and inclusive culture, capable of reflecting and enhancing the complexity of the society in which the cultural place operates.



Figure 2. Woman exploring a museum, taking pictures with smart phone (Source: Stockbyte, via canva.com, ID: MADGv399v5I, accessed March 4th, 2026). **Alt text:** A woman with long hair, seen from behind, takes a photograph of a framed painting displayed on a museum wall using her smartphone.

Implementation Strategies, Solutions and Action Plans

Core Strategy Checklist:

To ensure Universal Design doesn't remain a set of theoretical principles, it is essential that it be systematically integrated into museum processes. This means moving beyond a logic of ad hoc interventions and adopting a structured approach capable of supporting the institution through all phases of planning, management, and evaluation of the visiting experience. As previously mentioned, implementing Universal Design requires a shared vision and a cross-functional commitment that involves the entire organisation.

Integrating Universal Design principles into museum processes first and foremost means recognising them as reference criteria

for planning and decision-making. From exhibition design to communication, from cultural programming to public services, universal principles can serve as a guide to inform decisions and verify the coherence of actions undertaken. In this sense, Universal Design does not add to existing processes, but rather permeates them, helping to make them more informed and inclusive. The adoption of Universal Design in strategic decisions represents a crucial step. When universal principles are incorporated into the museum's mission, internal policies, and strategic documents, they take on a structural and lasting role. This approach allows for overcoming dependence on individual figures or isolated projects, fostering a long-term vision. Strategic decisions oriented towards Universal Design also contribute to strengthening the museum's identity as an institution attentive to the diversity of its audiences and responsible to the community.

Monitoring the effectiveness of the actions undertaken means constantly questioning the quality of the visiting experience in terms of fairness, autonomy, clarity, and inclusion. A checklist can be useful in this regard:

- ▶ **Map existing processes.** Identify all phases of cultural area design, management, and communication and evaluate where to apply Universal Design principles.
- ▶ **Align decisions with principles.** Before approving spaces, content, or services, verify that the choices are consistent with equity, autonomy, inclusion, and non-stigmatisation.
- ▶ **Involve and train the team.** Organise workshops or training sessions for architects, curators, designers, and mediators to apply the principles in their daily practice.

- ▶ **Evaluate and document visitor experience.** Use observation tools, questionnaires, or usability tests to measure the effectiveness of design solutions in terms of inclusion and accessibility.
- ▶ **Continuously update and improve.** Periodically review processes, content, and services based on collected feedback and evolving visitor needs.

The implementation of Universal Design must be understood as a continuous process of improvement. Audience needs, cultural practices, and social contexts evolve over time, necessitating constant updating of adopted strategies. Continuity of commitment is essential to prevent Universal Design from being perceived as a once-and-for-all goal.

Instead, it represents a dynamic journey that accompanies the museum throughout its development, strengthening its ability to respond consciously and inclusively to the challenges of the present and future.



Figure 3. Visitor in a museum (Source: YelenaYemchuk, via canva.com, ID:MADGyP5G-l8 , accessed March 4th, 2026). **Alt text:** A woman walks through a museum gallery holding a smartphone in one hand and looking at paintings displayed on the walls.

Summary

To conclude our journey through the principles of Universal Design, we summarize the five key points covered in this chapter, along with a brief glossary of key terms.

The key points:

- ▶ **Universal Design as an integrated approach:** it's not just about eliminating barriers, but about rethinking the entire experience to make it inclusive, coherent, and accessible to all visitors.
- ▶ **Universal principles as design criteria:** the seven principles guide decisions, layouts, communications, and services, ensuring equity, autonomy, and non-stigmatisation.
- ▶ **Cultural Responsibility of Museums:** Designing according to Universal Design means embracing accessibility as an institutional value and considering the museum a democratic public space.
- ▶ **From theory to practice:** implementation requires operational strategies, staff training, visitor experience evaluation, and ongoing training.
- ▶ **Sustainable inclusion over time:** Universal Design is a dynamic process that ensures continuity, coherence, and constant improvement of the museum experience.

Glossary

Universal Design (UD)

A design approach aimed at creating products, spaces, and services that can be used by as many people as possible, without special adaptations.

Design for All (DfA)

European concept that promotes design for human diversity, social inclusion and equal opportunities in cultural participation.

Inclusive Design (ID)

A design approach aimed at meeting the needs of the widest possible audience, regardless of age or ability, emphasising flexibility and inclusion.

Equity in use

The principle according to which every visitor must be able to access the museum's contents and spaces in dignified and adequate conditions.

Non-stigmatisation

Designing spaces, content, and services that do not distinguish visitors based on their abilities or special needs, avoiding symbolic exclusion.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Applying the principles of Universal Design to learning, with the aim of ensuring equal opportunities in access to curricula and teaching materials.

3. Human Centred Design (HCD)

Context

Cultural institutions are public spaces. This includes museums, art galleries, libraries, archives, cultural centres, and heritage sites. These places should be open, welcoming, and usable for everyone. This includes persons with disabilities, older people, children, and anyone who may need clearer information, better orientation, or more support during a visit.

In order to create an inclusive cultural experience, you should not start with objects, technology, or display tools. You should start with people. You need to understand who your visitors are, what they need, what barriers they face, and what helps them feel welcome, safe, and confident in the space.

This is the purpose of Human-Centred Design (HCD). HCD is a way of planning and designing that puts people at the centre of the process. It helps you create exhibitions, services, programmes, and spaces that are easier to use and easier to understand. It also helps you avoid costly mistakes, because you test ideas early and improve them before the final result is in place.

This approach also supports your legal and ethical responsibilities. Across the European Union, accessibility is no longer seen as an optional extra. It is part of equal access to culture and public life. For cultural institutions, this means that inclusion should be part of everyday practice, not a one-time project or a special activity for a small group.

This chapter helps you understand how to use HCD in your work. It focuses on the method, the process, and the decisions you need to make when planning inclusive cultural experiences.

Human-Centred design (HCD) concept and its inclusive vision

At the present time, the simplest definition of the human-Centred design (HCD) concept comes from the international standard ISO 9241-210:2019(E), titled "Ergonomics of human-system interaction Part 210: Human-centred design for interactive systems". This technical definition describes HCD as an approach to creating interactive systems that are both usable and useful by focusing on the people who will use them, specifically on their needs, abilities and expectations. The key focal points of this method implemented in the product, services and environment designs are:

- ▶ Improving effectiveness and efficiency,
- ▶ Enhancing user satisfaction and his well-being,
- ▶ Ensuring accessibility and sustainability,
- ▶ Preventing negative impacts on health, safety, and performance.

This approach is important because cultural institutions are public spaces. Museums, galleries, libraries, archives, theatres, and heritage sites should be open to everyone. They should not work well only for visitors who already know how to move through them,

read their signs, or use their services. They should also work for people who need clearer information, better orientation, more support, or different ways to access content.

If you use Human-Centred Design, you make this your starting point. You design with real users in mind. You do not guess what people need. You ask them. You observe how they use the space. You test your ideas. Then you improve them.

This is especially important in cultural institutions because the visitor experience is made of many parts. It is not only about the exhibition, the performance, or the collection. It also includes the website, the entrance, the ticket desk, the signs, the route through the building, the seating, the toilets, the staff, and the way information is shared. A visitor may leave not because the content is not interesting, but because the route is confusing, the text is too hard to read, the sound is unclear, or help is not easy to find.

For this reason, Human-Centred Design helps you look at the whole journey. It helps you understand where a visitor may feel lost, tired, excluded, or stressed. It also helps you find solutions that are practical and realistic.

In cultural institutions, HCD is also important because visitors are very different. Some are older people. Some are children. Some are first-time visitors. Some have physical, sensory, cognitive, or emotional barriers. Some need quiet spaces, simple language, high contrast, extra time, or personal support. Good design does not treat these needs as exceptional. It sees them as part of normal human diversity.

This is one of the strongest points of HCD. It helps you move away from the idea that accessibility is an extra task added at the end. Instead, accessibility becomes part of the main design process. It is built in from the start. This usually leads to better results for everyone. When information is clearer, spaces are easier to navigate, and services are easier to use, many more people benefit.

Human-Centred Design: co-creating principle

Human-Centred Design means that you start with people. You do not start with the building, the technology, or the collection. You first ask who will use the space, what they need, what barriers they face, and what helps them take part with confidence. ISO 9241-210 describes HCD as a process that focuses on users, their tasks, their context, and repeated evaluation and improvement.

In cultural institutions, this is especially important for persons with sensory disabilities. This includes people who are blind, low vision, deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, or people with sensory processing differences. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities says that persons with disabilities have the right to take part in cultural life on an equal basis with others, including access to museums, libraries, theatres, and heritage sites. It also says that public bodies must closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities in decisions that affect them.

For you, this means one clear thing: **Persons with Sensory Disabilities (PwSD)** should not be invited only to test the final result. They should be part of the design process from the start. They should help shape the brief, identify priorities, review plans, test ideas, and judge whether the final solution is useful in real life. This is how you make solutions desirable and relevant, not only technically compliant.

- **Understand the full visitor journey.** Look at the whole experience, not only one room or one object. Think about arrival, website, ticket desk, entrance, orientation, moving through the space, asking for help, taking part in activities, resting, and leaving. HCD asks you to study real use in real context, not only your design idea on paper.
- **Build co-creation into the process.** Create a small advisory group or work with local disability organisations. Include people with different sensory experiences. Pay them if you can. If the budget is small, work with a small group but meet them regularly. Ask them simple questions: What is hard here? What helps? What feels clear? What feels stressful? What would make the visit better?
- **Prototype early. Do not wait for the final installation.** Test early versions of the route, signs, labels, website pages, service points, and audio or text content. You can test with paper plans, printed drafts, taped floor routes, or a simple mock-up. Early testing helps you find problems before they become expensive.
- **Focus on real barriers, including small ones.** Small barriers can stop a whole visit. A heavy door, poor contrast, unclear wording, background noise, or a staff member who gives the wrong instruction can make a person feel excluded. HCD helps you notice these details because you watch what people actually do, not what you expect them to do.
- **Train staff and connect design with service.** Accessibility is not only about physical space. It is also about how people are welcomed and supported. Staff should know what support exists, how to explain it clearly, and how to respond with

respect. In practice, this means your front-of-house team should be part of the HCD process too.

- **Review and improve after opening.** HCD does not end on opening day. Keep collecting feedback. Ask PwSD what worked and what did not. Watch where people hesitate, turn back, or need help. Then make small improvements. This ongoing review is part of good human-centred practice and fits the view that museum accessibility is a long-term process.

Human-Centred Design in practice

Human-Centred Design offers cultural institutions – museums, galleries, libraries, and heritage sites – a practical and ethical framework for making their spaces and content accessible and inclusive. At its core, HCD shifts the focus from institutional priorities, such as curatorial authority or aesthetic presentation, to the lived experiences of visitors. This shift is particularly important when addressing accessibility, as traditional exhibition models often assume a narrow range of sensory, cognitive, and physical abilities. The practice strategy is simple and can be resumed in seven points:

- **HCD is simple:** You focus on real users. You think about the people who will truly come to your institution. This includes older people, children, first-time visitors, people with disabilities, tourists, school groups, and people who may need more support. If you design for real users, you are more likely to create something that works in practice.
- **Focus on needs and context:** You do not only ask what people want. You also ask where they use the service, what may stop them, and what conditions shape their experience. For example, a route may look clear on paper but feel confusing in a crowded

building. A sign may seem simple but be hard to read in low light. A digital tool may seem useful but be difficult to use when a visitor is stressed or in a hurry.

- **Focus on usefulness and usability:** It should be clear and easy to use. A service is successful when visitors can understand it and use it without unnecessary effort. For you, this means asking practical questions. Can visitors find their way? Can they understand what to do next? Can they use the information without confusion? Can they complete the visit with confidence? If the answer is no, then the design still needs work.
- **Focus on accessibility:** You make sure that people with different needs can take part with dignity and independence. Accessibility is not an extra feature. It is a basic part of good design. This is especially important for people with sensory disabilities, but it also helps many other visitors. Clear language, better orientation, flexible formats, and supportive staff improve the experience for everyone. If you include accessibility from the start, you reduce barriers before they become bigger problems.
- **Focus on well-being and safety:** A good design should not create stress, confusion, discomfort, or risk. Visitors should feel safe in the space. They should know where to go, where to stop, and where to ask for help. They should not feel overwhelmed by unclear instructions, noise, crowding, or poor organisation.
- **Focus on testing and improvement:** HCD is not a one-time action. It is a process. You test, learn, adjust, and test again. You do not wait until everything is finished. You check early ideas, draft layouts, sample texts, routes, and tools. Then you

listen to feedback and improve what does not work. This saves time, reduces mistakes, and leads to better results.

- **Focus on collaboration:** Good design does not come from one person alone. It grows through teamwork, user feedback, and shared decisions. Curators, designers, educators, technicians, front-of-house staff, and users all bring useful knowledge. When you work together, you see more clearly what helps and what creates barriers.



Figure 1. Diagram titled "Human-Centred Design for Persons with Sensory Disabilities" (Source: AI-generated image, created by SenseAble Culture project for illustrative purposes, 2026). **Alt text:** The image shows a circular model with people at the centre and key design principles around them. In the middle are three figures representing users with different sensory needs, including a blind person with a white cane, a person using sign language, and a person using headphones. Around them are coloured sections linked in a circle. These sections show the main steps of Human-Centred Design: focus on real users, focus on needs and context, focus on usefulness and usability, focus on accessibility, focus on well-being and safety, focus on testing and improvement, and focus on collaboration.

Implementation Strategies, Solutions and Action Plans

Knowing what to do is one thing. Making it happen in daily museum work is another. If you want to apply Human-Centred Design for accessibility, you need a clear strategy, steady commitment, and support from the whole institution.

- ▶ **Accessibility and inclusive design should be part of your institution's main goals.** They should not be treated as secondary issues. Create an Accessibility Action Plan that explains what you want to improve, what steps you will take, when they will happen, and who is responsible. A written plan helps your team work together and shows funders, partners, and the public that your museum takes accessibility seriously. It should include physical and digital changes, staff training, outreach, and evaluation. You can also decide to consult disabled users in every major project.
- ▶ **Involve users from the start.** Create clear and regular ways to involve people with disabilities in museum decisions. Do not ask for feedback only at the end. You can create an accessibility advisory group or work with local disability organisations, such as an association for blind people, a Deaf community group etc. They can help you review plans, test ideas, and identify barriers. This is a key part of Human-Centred Design. It means that disabled users help shape the project, not only test the final

result. If possible, pay them for their time and expertise.

- ▶ **Check your current situation.** Start with an accessibility audit. Review the building, the exhibitions, and the digital services. Look at ramps, lifts, doors, signs, lighting, sound, seating, websites, apps, booking tools, and digital guides. If possible, do this with disabled users or accessibility specialists. Also review the full visitor journey from the point of view of a person with sensory disabilities. Ask simple questions: Can visitors find information before the visit? Can they book a ticket easily? Are guides available in accessible formats? Are videos captioned? Can visitors understand where to go when they arrive? This helps you find pain points. Then list the issues and divide them into priorities: quick fixes, medium-term improvements, and long-term changes.
- ▶ **Work with others.** You do not need to improve accessibility alone. Work with other museums, networks, and organisations that already have experience in this field. They can share tools, training materials, and practical advice. This can save time and help you avoid mistakes. You can also build partnerships with museums that have already solved problems similar to yours and learn directly from their experience.



Figure 2. Persons with Sensory Disabilities discussing with a museum staff member (Source: AI-generated image, created by SenseAble Culture project for illustrative purposes, 2026). **Alt text:** A museum staff member sits at a table with two persons with low vision in a gallery space. They are having a discussion about how to improve access to the exhibition. The image represents a co-creation meeting where museum staff and visitors with sensory disabilities work together to improve the visitor experience.

Examples:

- **Museum:** If your museum is part of a regional group, you can work together with other institutions. This helps you share costs and resources. For example, several museums can: share the cost of a sign language interpreter for events, develop a common Braille guide template, organise joint staff training on accessibility, invite the same user group to test different projects.
- **Library:** Organise a meeting with local organisations of blind and low-vision people, deaf and hard-of-hearing people, and people with sensory processing differences. During the meeting,

review the library's current signs together and discuss what needs to improve. The goal is to create signage that is easy to understand in practice. There is no single sign system that all libraries must use. For this reason, a good solution is to use European accessibility guidance as a starting point, then test the new signs with local users before final installation. This helps make sure that the signs are not only correct in theory, but also clear and useful in real life.

Summary

You should not design for an imagined visitor. You should design for the people who will actually use the space. This means understanding their needs, barriers, and experiences from the start. Persons with sensory disabilities must be involved as co-creators. They should not only test the final result. They should help shape the project during planning, testing, and review.

Test, improve, and work with others. HCD is a continuous process. You should test ideas early, collect feedback, improve step by step, and learn from users, partners, and other institutions.

Accessibility must be part of everyday practice. It should not be treated as an extra task or a one-time action. You should include it in your strategy, budget, staff training, audits, and long-term planning.

Look at the whole visitor journey. Accessibility is not only about the exhibition room. You should think about the website, booking, entrance, orientation, staff support, rest areas, and exit.

Glossary

Accessibility

The condition that allows people with different needs and abilities to use a space, service, or information without unnecessary barriers.

Co-creation

A process in which users help shape a project from the beginning. They do not only test the final result. They take part in planning, discussion, and decision-making.

Accessibility Audit

A careful review of a museum, exhibition, service, or website to identify barriers that make access difficult for people with disabilities. The findings help plan improvements.

Accessibility Action Plan

A written document that explains what you want to improve, what steps you will take, who is responsible, and when the work will happen.

Prototype

A simple early version of a product, service, space, or tool that you use to test an idea before the final version is made. A prototype helps you find problems early and improve the design step by step.

4. The Phases of the Accessibility Chain

Context

An accessible cultural space is not just a building with ramps. It is a place that welcomes visitors with sensory disabilities at every step of their journey. This chapter introduces the Accessibility Chain model. The model helps you understand how visitors with visual impairments, hearing loss, and sensory processing differences experience your museum, library, or community cultural centre.

The Accessibility Chain works like a real chain. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. The visitor journey has three phases: Decision to Visit, Planning the Visit, and The Visit Itself. If any one phase fails, the whole visit can fail. This chapter shows you how to strengthen each link. It also explains why feedback matters so much: only by listening to visitors and changing our practices can we keep getting better. Feedback is what turns the chain into a loop.

Understanding the Accessibility Chain

What Is the Accessibility Chain?

A cultural visit is not a single moment. It is a series of connected experiences. The journey starts before someone arrives at your door. It continues after they leave. Each step can welcome people in or push them away.

If any part of the journey is inaccessible, the whole visit fails. You

might have ramps, lifts, and accessible toilets. But if your website does not work with screen readers, blind visitors cannot find out about your institution. Or your website might be perfect, but if there is no accessible transport to your building, visitors who cannot drive cannot come.

Here is an example: A blind woman finds information about audio-described tours on your website. She feels confident enough to visit. When she arrives, there is no tactile path to the entrance. No staff offer help. Exhibit labels are not in audio. The on-site experience breaks the chain, and she leaves disappointed.

This is why all parts of accessibility must work together. Marketing, exhibition design, staff training, and building access must match each other. The Accessibility Chain follows Universal Design principles: you remove barriers before they happen and design for everyone from the start.

The chain has three phases and each one matters.

Phase 1. Decision to Visit. Someone learns about your cultural space and asks: will this place work for me? Will staff understand my needs? Can I get there? They need clear, accessible information to answer these questions.

Phase 2. Planning the Visit. Someone prepares for their trip. They need practical details: transport options, what the environment will be like, whether they can bring a guide dog, and whether their assistant can enter free of charge. Knowing what to expect reduces anxiety.

Phase 3. The Visit Itself. The on-site experience from arrival to

departure. Can visitors navigate your building? Can they understand the exhibits? Are staff helpful? Is there a quiet space? What happens in an emergency?

And then there is feedback. Feedback is not a phase. It is what closes the loop and turns the chain into something that keeps improving. When you ask visitors what worked and what did not, you find problems you would never spot alone. Only by listening and changing our practices can we get better. Without feedback, the chain stays the same forever, and so do its weak links.



Figure 1. The Accessibility Chain: three connected phases of a visit, supported by a feedback loop (Source: AI-generated image, created by SenseAble Culture project for illustrative purposes, 2026). **Alt text:** The diagram shows the accessibility chain as three boxes arranged from left to right, connected by arrows that show the order of the phases. Box 1, "Decision to visit", asks: "Does the person find out and decide to come?" Box 2, "Planning the visit", asks: "Can they plan and know what to expect?" Box 3, "The visit itself", asks: "Do the entrance, content, and staff interact well?" Below the three boxes is a wider banner labelled "Feedback loop – the chain becomes a cycle that keeps improving", marked with a circular arrow symbol. The banner shows that what is learned from each visit feeds back into the earlier phases, so the chain works as a continuous cycle rather than a one-way path.

Before the Visit

Decision and Planning Together

This subtopic covers the pre-visit experience, which brings Phase 1 and Phase 2 together. Why? Because deciding to visit and planning to visit share the same kinds of barriers and solutions. Both happen before the visitor arrives. Both depend on information. A person cannot separate "deciding" from "planning" when they need to check if the place will work for them at all. So we treat them as one pre-visit journey.

For most people, visiting a museum is a casual choice. For people with sensory disabilities, it is rarely casual. They must plan carefully and check if their access needs can be met. The quality of pre-visit information decides whether a visit happens at all.

Common Barriers Before the Visit

Inaccessible digital content. A website that does not work with screen readers shuts out blind visitors. Videos without captions shut out deaf audiences. Maps that are only images cannot be read by assistive technology. The European Accessibility Act requires information through multiple sensory channels.

Missing practical details. A statement like "wheelchair accessible" is not enough. Visitors need specific details: step-free routes from transport, where to park, what services you offer (audio guides, sign language tours, hearing loops), companion policies, and what the sensory environment is like.

No way to know what to expect. Autistic visitors and others with sensory processing differences need to know about crowd levels,

noise, lighting, and quiet spaces before they come. Without this, uncertainty itself becomes a barrier.

Transport gaps and unclear policies. If there is no accessible transport, no Blue Badge parking (the European disability parking permit), or if the walking route is difficult, the visit cannot happen. Unclear policies about service animals, assistants, and assistive equipment also stop visits.

Good Practices Before the Visit

Provide full, accessible information. Create a clear accessibility section on your website and link to it from the main menu. Cover transport, arrival, facilities, services, and ticketing. Meet the latest WCAG standards. Add captions and sign language to videos. Offer downloadable materials in large print, audio, and accessible PDF.

Show that you welcome everyone. Use photographs that show visitors with different abilities. Write an accessibility statement. Mention staff capabilities, for example: "Our staff are trained in disability awareness" or "Sign language interpretation is available by advance booking".

Offer pre-visit guides. Include photos of entrances, key spaces, and facilities. Describe the sensory environment: lighting levels, noise, quiet spaces. Create social stories for autistic visitors. These materials reduce anxiety because they help people know what is coming.

Clarify policies and help with the journey. State clearly that personal assistants enter free of charge and service animals are welcome. Explain how to book specialist services. Give transport

details. Offer several contact methods, including email and online forms, because deaf visitors cannot use voice calls.



Figure 2. A visitor at the information desk of the Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation uses a hearing loop handset, marked with the international T-coil symbol, to access audio content compatible with her hearing aid (Source: Apeirons, 2026).

Alt text: A young woman with long blonde hair stands at the wooden information desk of the Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation, located in Riga Castle. She is smiling and holding a black induction loop handset to her right ear. The device on the desk displays the international hearing loop symbol – a stylised ear with a "T" indicating it is compatible with the T-coil setting on hearing aids. On the desk are stacked leaflets about the museum and its accessibility in both English and Latvian.

The Visit Itself

The On-Site Experience

This is Phase 3. It is where your pre-visit promises are tested. Even the best information can be weakened if the on-site experience fails. This phase covers everything from arrival to departure, including what happens when things go wrong.

Common Barriers During the Visit

Unwelcoming arrival and poor navigation. Barriers appear when the accessible entrance is hidden or unstaffed, when reception staff cannot communicate, or when ticket counters have no hearing loops. When a blind visitor is handed only a printed brochure, the message is clear: their needs were not expected. Inside, missing tactile floor markers, low-contrast signs, and audio-only announcements create more barriers.

Single-sensory exhibits. When content is only visual, blind visitors are shut out. When audio has no captions, deaf visitors miss everything. Exhibitions that rely on one sense fail many visitors.

Sensory overload without rest. Echoing spaces, crowd noise, loud audio, and flashing lights can overwhelm autistic visitors and others with sensory processing differences. Without a quiet space to recover, these visitors have to leave.

Staff communication problems. Staff who speak without using gestures, written notes, or visual aids exclude deaf visitors. Vague verbal directions fail blind visitors. Treating people as if they cannot decide for themselves, such as speaking to a blind person's companion instead of the person, takes away their dignity.

No emergency plan for sensory disabilities. Audio-only fire alarms leave deaf visitors uninformed. Visual-only evacuation maps leave blind visitors without guidance. Staff untrained in assisting visitors with sensory disabilities during emergencies make the situation worse.

Good Practices During the Visit

Create a welcoming arrival. Station staff at accessible entrances. Train front-desk staff to offer help respectfully. Provide tactile floor plans, large-print maps, and hearing loops at counters.

Design navigation for all senses. Install tactile strips to key areas. Use high-contrast signs with Braille. Offer audio navigation through smartphone apps. Make sure emergency alerts have both sound and flashing lights.

Make exhibits multi-sensory. Offer tactile replicas and raised diagrams. Provide audio descriptions, captions, transcripts, sign language options, assistive listening devices, and large-print labels.

Support sensory regulation. Set up sensory-friendly visiting times with reduced attendance and lower sensory input. Offer loaner headphones, earplugs, and Sensory Kits. Create a clearly marked quiet space. Train staff to recognise and respond to sensory overload.

Prepare for emergencies. Make sure alarms include both sound and flashing lights. Train staff to help visitors with different sensory disabilities during evacuations. Practise these procedures regularly.



Figure 3. At the entrance to an exhibition, a guide shows a large-print leaflet to a visitor with low vision, helping him orient to the exhibition's content before the visit begins (Source: Apeirons, 2026). **Alt text:** A woman with long brown hair and glasses, wearing a striped top and dark hoodie, stands beside a young man in a red and black checked shirt at the entrance to an exhibition space. She is holding open a printed leaflet with large text, which they are looking at together. The man is wearing dark glasses and holding a folded white cane in his right hand. In the background, two other visitors are entering the space through a doorway.

Closing the Loop: Why Feedback Matters

Feedback is what turns your accessibility work into something that keeps improving. Without it, you are guessing. With it, you know what actually works and what does not. Set up accessible feedback channels: comment cards in large print and Braille, online surveys that work with screen readers, follow-up emails, and face-to-face conversations. Review the feedback regularly and look for patterns. If several visitors report the same problem, fix it. Positive feedback shows what to keep doing. Each cycle benefits the next visitor and makes the chain stronger.

Putting It Into Practice: Strengthening Your Accessibility Chain

The subtopics above tell you what to do. This section is about how to approach the work. Museums, libraries, and community cultural centres can all use these five strategies to make real progress, even with limited resources.

Core Strategy Checklist

- 1. Map your visitor journey and find the weak links.** Walk through the visitor journey from the perspective of someone with a sensory disability. Can a blind person find information on your website? Can a deaf person book without calling? Can visitors navigate without vision or hearing? Write down every barrier. This map tells you where to focus.
- 2. Start small and build up.** You do not need a full accessibility overhaul to begin. Pick one weak link and fix it first. Maybe it is your website, maybe it is staff training, maybe it is a quiet space. Small wins build momentum and show your team what is possible. A perfect plan you cannot afford helps no one.
- 3. Involve people with sensory disabilities as co-creators.** Invite blind, deaf, and neurodivergent people to test your visitor journey as expert consultants. Their lived experience shows barriers that staff do not see. Co-creation means working together as equal partners, not just asking for opinions. Pay them for their time, the same way you would pay any other expert.
- 4. Measure what matters.** Track progress in simple ways. How many visitors with sensory disabilities came last year compared to this year? How many complaints did you receive, and how many

compliments? Did the fixes you made solve the problems visitors raised? You cannot improve what you do not measure, but you also do not need complicated systems to start.

5. Keep the loop going. Accessibility is never finished. Read feedback regularly. Communicate the changes you make, so visitors know their input mattered. Build a habit of review, perhaps once a season or once a year. Each cycle strengthens your chain and keeps your institution responsive.

Examples in Different Settings

In a museum: The accessibility webpage shows bus routes, entrance photos, and which exhibits have audio description. Staff are trained in disability awareness. A volunteer greets visitors at the accessible entrance. Exhibitions have tactile models with Braille labels and audio description via a smartphone app. All videos are captioned. A quiet space is available. Post-visit surveys guide improvements.

In a library: The online catalogue works with screen readers. Staff help deaf visitors using written notes or text-to-speech apps. A social story with photos shows how to use the building. Quiet hours run weekly. Feedback forms come in multiple formats, including large print and Braille.

In a community cultural centre: Even small rural venues can strengthen their chain. Social media posts include accessibility information. High-contrast signs and tactile markers guide visitors. Staff greet visitors personally and ask about their needs. Events offer reserved front seating for visitors with hearing or visual

impairments and a quiet corner during busy community gatherings. Regular visitors give feedback for seasonal improvements.



Figure 4. A blind visitor explores a tactile scale model of the Latvian Freedom Monument during the exhibition, using touch to access a piece of cultural heritage that would otherwise remain visual only (Source: Apeirons, 2026). **Alt text:** A young man in a red and black checked shirt stands beside a circular wooden display plinth in an exhibition room. He is wearing dark glasses and holds a white cane in his left hand, while reaching out with his right hand to touch a detailed scale model of the Latvian Freedom Monument. The model shows the tall column topped with the figure of Liberty holding three stars, and the sculptural groups around its base. Behind him, exhibition panels in Latvian and English display historical photographs and a map of Latvia. Another visitor is taking a photograph in the background.

Summary

Accessibility is a chain. Your cultural institution has three phases: Decision, Planning, and The Visit. All three must be accessible. If one fails, the whole visit fails.

Information is the foundation. Clear, accessible information helps at every phase. Make sure your website works with screen readers. Provide details about transport, facilities, and services in multiple formats.

Knowing what to expect reduces barriers. Give detailed information before visits. Describe the sensory environment. Offer pre-visit guides and social stories.

Staff are as important as buildings. Well-trained, flexible staff can overcome physical barriers. Unprepared staff can ruin an accessible building.

Feedback closes the loop. Listen to visitors with sensory disabilities. Change your practices based on what they tell you. This is the only way to keep getting better.

Glossary

Accessibility Chain

The connected phases in a cultural visit: Decision, Planning, and The Visit. Each must be accessible for the whole experience to succeed. Feedback closes the loop.

Blue Badge

A European parking permit for people with disabilities, allowing parking in designated spaces near entrances.

Pre-visit guide

A document that prepares visitors for a trip. It includes building photos, procedure descriptions, and sensory information. It reduces anxiety, especially for autistic visitors.

Sensory kit (or sensory bag)

A collection of tools visitors can borrow: noise-cancelling headphones, fidget toys, sunglasses, earplugs. It helps visitors with autism or sensory processing differences regulate their experience.

Social story

A tool for autistic visitors using simple text and photographs to describe what will happen during a visit. It increases predictability and reduces anxiety.

5. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Guidance

Context

Welcome to Chapter 5. This section provides you with essential digital strategies to make your cultural institutions – such as libraries, theatres, and museums – truly inclusive. As we move further into the digital age, your institution's website and online platforms often serve as the **"digital front door"**. For Persons with Sensory Disabilities (PwSD), these platforms are the primary tools used to plan visits, purchase tickets, and engage with virtual exhibitions autonomously and meaningfully.

Implementing the **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)** is not merely a technical task; it is a fundamental requirement to uphold the **Human Rights-Based Approach to Disability**. Grounded in **Article 9 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**, access to information and communications technology is a recognised human right. By ensuring fair access, you are actively removing the digital environmental barriers that prevent individuals from participating in cultural life on an equal basis with others.

This chapter is also critical for legal compliance. **Under the**

European Accessibility Act (EAA), most digital services were required to adapt and to meet functional accessibility requirements by **28 June 2025**. By following this guidance, you will ensure your digital resources meet basic EU standards, specifically focusing on mitigating barriers for users with visual, hearing, and cognitive impairments. Whether you are a curator, a librarian, or a communication officer, this chapter empowers you to design digital spaces that embrace human diversity as a core design standard.

Why Digital Accessibility is the "Digital Front Door" to Culture

At the heart of this chapter is the **Social Model of Disability**, which asserts that disability is not an inherent trait of an individual, but rather the result of the interaction between persons with impairments and the various external barriers imposed by society. In the digital sphere, these barriers include inaccessible websites, unstructured content, and lack of assistive technology support, which effectively segregate individuals from cultural participation.

By adopting **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)**, cultural institutions shift their focus to **identifying and removing the environmental obstacles** that hinder full and effective societal participation of Persons with Disabilities.

Digital Accessibility ensures that information is available via **more than one sensory channel** – for example, providing text-to-speech for blind users or captions for deaf users – thereby mitigating barriers in visual or auditory reception and **avoiding sensory overload**.

Human Rights-based approach

Access to information is a recognised human right under **Article 9 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**. This convention mandates that all signatories, including the EU and its Member States, take appropriate measures to ensure that Persons with Disabilities have access to information and communications technologies (ICT). Digital accessibility is an essential "enabler" of rights, autonomy, and equality, allowing users to find, understand, and use cultural resources independently.

The European Legal Mandate (EAA)

The transition from a "good practice" to a legal requirement is solidified by the **European Accessibility Act (Directive 2019/882)**. The **EAA** harmonises accessibility requirements across the EU, specifically targeting digital services like e-commerce and electronic communications. Starting **June 28, 2025**, many digital products and services such as e-commerce, banking, transport, telecoms, audiovisual media and certain hardware must meet these functional requirements. For cultural institutions, this means that ensuring your digital platforms are **understandable and perceivable** via more than one sensory channel is no longer optional – it is a legal obligation.

Digital Autonomy in the Cultural Sector

For a visitor with a disability, a website is often the "digital front door" to a museum, library, or theatre. If this "digital front door" is "locked" by technical barriers, Persons with Disabilities lose their autonomy and are forced to rely on others for basic tasks like plan their visits, purchase tickets, and engage with virtual exhibitions

autonomously. By adhering to WCAG (2.2) standards, cultural spaces move beyond basic physical access to provide a holistic, inclusive experience that embraces human diversity as a core design standard.

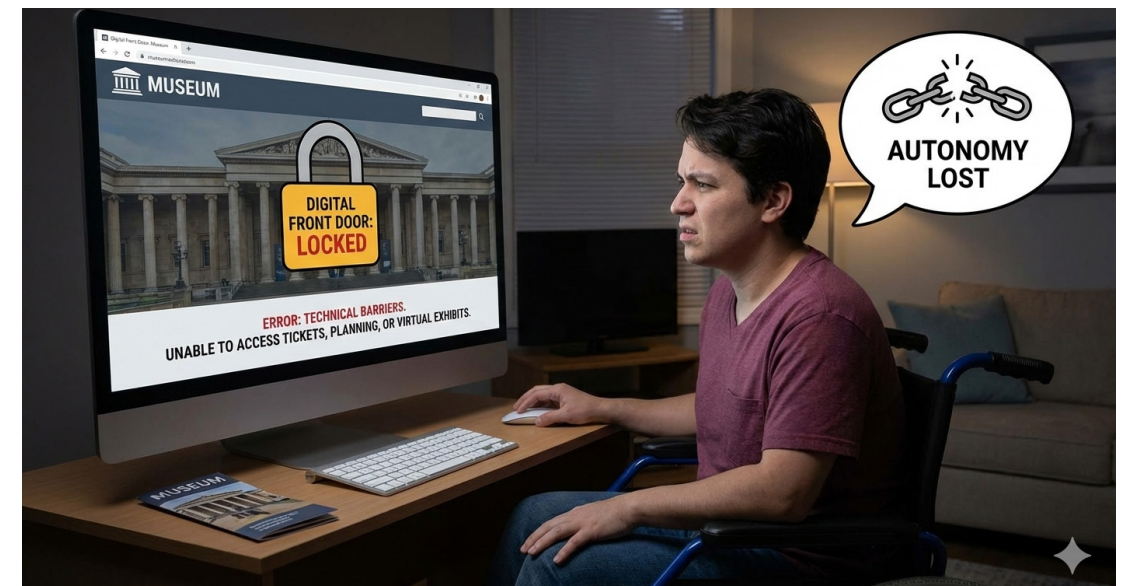


Figure 1. Person accessing a museum website on a desktop (Source: AI-generated image, created by SenseAble Culture project for illustrative purposes, 2026).

Alt text: A frustrated person on a wheelchair unable to buy museum tickets online due to an inaccessible website.

Universal Design and Sensory Inclusion

This chapter grounds digital strategies in the Universal Design (UD) approach, which seeks to design products and environments to be usable by all people to the greatest extent possible without the need for adaptation. By applying Human-Centred Design (HCD), cultural institutions ensure that the actual needs of Persons with Disabilities and in particular, of those with Sensory Disabilities, are at the centre of the design process of digital environment from beginning to end.

The POUR Principles: The Four Pillars of Digital Inclusion

To ensure your cultural institution is truly accessible, your digital platforms must be built on a solid foundation. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 and the European Accessibility Act (EAA) organise all accessibility requirements into four core principles: Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, and Robust, often referred to by the acronym POUR. These pillars are not just technical checkboxes; they are the standards that allow Persons with Sensory Disabilities (PwSD) to navigate your museum's collections, book theatre tickets, or access library archives on an equal basis with everyone else.

1. Perceivable: Information Must Be Seen or Heard

The principle of perceivability means that users must be able to identify the information and interface components using the senses available to them. For cultural institutions, this means you cannot rely on a single sensory channel – such as sight – to convey essential content.

- ▶ **Text Alternatives:** You must provide alternative text (alt-text) for all non-text content, such as images of historical artefacts or promotional posters, so that screen readers can "read" them to blind users.
- ▶ **Multi-Sensory Options:** Information should be available in more than one format. For example, if you post a video of a gallery tour, you should include captions for users who are deaf and audio descriptions for those who are blind.
- ▶ **Adaptable and Distinguishable:** Your website design should allow users to change the presentation, such as increasing font

size (minimum 12pt) or choosing high-contrast colour schemes that aid users with low vision. Colour should never be the only way you communicate information, such as using only red text to indicate an error.

2. Operable: The Interface Must Be Usable

Operability ensures that everyone can navigate your digital "front door", regardless of how they interact with technology. Many Persons with Sensory Disabilities use assistive technologies instead of a traditional mouse, so your website must accommodate these tools.

- ▶ **Keyboard Accessibility:** Every part of your website – from the navigation menu to ticket booking forms – must be operable via a keyboard only. This is essential for users with motor impairments or those who use voice-controlled navigation.
- ▶ **Enough Time:** You should provide users with adequate time to read content or complete tasks. Avoid "timed-out" sessions that might frustrate someone who needs more time to process visual or auditory information.
- ▶ **Safe Navigation:** To protect users with photosensitive sensitivities, avoid design elements that flicker or flash more than three times per second, as these can trigger seizures.

3. Understandable: Content Must Be Clear

Being "understandable" means that both the information on your site and the way the site works must be clear to the user. Consistency is key for users with sensory and cognitive disabilities who may feel overwhelmed by complex layouts.

- **Readable Text:** You should use plain language and a clear sans-serif font (like Verdana) to make your content easy to read. Any technical jargon related to art or history should be clearly explained.
- **Predictability:** Your navigation menus should appear in the same relative order across all pages. When a user clicks a button, the result should be exactly what they expect, preventing confusion or accidental errors.
- **Input Assistance:** If a user makes a mistake on a form – like missing a field when signing up for a library card – your site should provide clear, descriptive error messages that explain how to fix the problem.

4. Robust: Compatibility with Future Tech

A robust website is one that can be reliably interpreted by a wide variety of "user agents", including current and future assistive technologies.

- **Maximising Compatibility:** You must ensure that your website’s underlying code (HTML) is clean and standard. This allows tools like screen readers, Braille displays, and magnification software to work seamlessly with your content.
- **Supporting Autonomy:** By adhering to robustness, you ensure that Persons with Sensory Disabilities do not have to rely on a specific, expensive device to access your institution’s culture; they can use the tools that work best for their individual needs.

Easy Nudges for Digital Accessibility & Inclusion

As a museum curator, librarian, or theatre manager, complying with the European Accessibility Act might feel daunting. However, accessibility "by design" is often about simple, low-cost nudges that significantly improve the website experience for all your visitors. Here is how you can move from abstract theory to practical implementation today.

Visual Nudges: Contrast and Descriptions

Your first priority is ensuring that the visual content of your institution website is perceivable by everyone, including those with low vision or colour blindness.

- **Check Your Contrast:** You should never rely on colour alone to convey information (e.g., "click the red button"). Use free tools like colourcontrast.cc or the WebAIM Contrast Checker to ensure your text stands out. Aim for a minimum ratio of 4.5:1 for normal text. The greater the difference in lightness between the text and its background, the higher the contrast ratio will be.

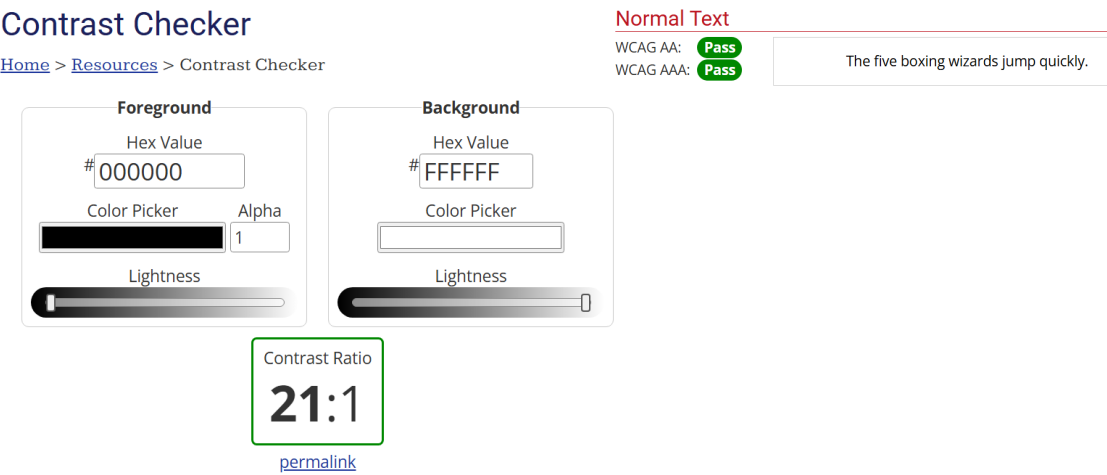


Figure 2. Colour contrast checker (Source: WebAIM Contrast Checker, screenshot captured for educational purposes, accessed 27th February, 2026).
Alt text: A colour contrast checker showing a perfect 21:1 score, which passes all accessibility standards.

- **Master the Alt-Text:** For every artefact image or show poster, you must provide alt-text. Skip phrases like "image of" or "picture of" – the screen reader already knows it is an image. Instead, describe the context. For a terracotta pot, describe its texture and form; for a marketing photo, focus on the action, such as "a child painting in the museum lounge". Always end your description with a period so the screen reader pauses naturally.



Figure 3. Child engaged in a painting activity in a museum learning space (Source: AI-generated image, created by SenseAble Culture project for illustrative purposes, 2026). **Alt text:** A young child painting on a large canvas in an open museum lounge, surrounded by paint boxes on the floor.

Interaction Nudges: Keyboard and Multimedia

Many of your visitors may browse your archive or book tickets without using a mouse.

- **The "Tab" Test:** Put down your mouse and try to navigate your website using only the Tab key. Can you see where you are? You must have a visible focus indicator (usually a coloured box or outline) that follows your "jump" through the page. If the focus

disappears, your keyboard-using visitors are lost.

- **Simple Multimedia:** If you have a video of a play or a virtual tour, you don't need expensive software for transcripts. Providing a full text-based transcript of the dialogue and key sounds is a high-impact, low-cost way to help both d/Deaf visitors and those who prefer reading over watching.

The "Easy-to-Read" standards

In the European cultural sector, cognitive accessibility is just as vital as physical access. Think of a museum. Ramps and lifts provide physical access. But what about access to information? Cognitive accessibility ensures everyone can understand and engage with your online content. It is just as vital as a wheelchair ramp.

What is Plain Language?

It is a way of writing that is direct, clear, and respectful. It helps all visitors, including:

- Tourists.
- Neurodivergent people (like people on the Autism Spectrum Disorder).
- People with learning disabilities.
- Anyone feeling tired or overwhelmed.

How to Use Plain Language: Three Simple Rules

- 1. Use short sentences.** Break complex ideas into small steps. This makes them easier to follow.
- 2. Use active verbs.** Say "The artist made this", not "This was made by the artist". It is more direct.
- 3. Explain hard words immediately.** If you use a term like "chiaroscuro", add a simple definition right after: "...which means using strong light and dark shadows".

The right to understand is a fundamental right. Using Plain Language removes barriers. It ensures that every single visitor, regardless of their background or ability, can connect with your collections, stories, and ideas (online or offline). When you make information easy to read, you don't just help a few people. You create a more welcoming and inclusive space for everyone.

Implementation Strategies, Solutions and Action Plans

A Practical 3-Step Evaluation Framework for the Digital Accessibility of your Website

You do not need to be a developer to start auditing your institution's website. Follow this simple path:

Step 1: Automated Auditing. Run your website through free tools like the WAVE extension (by WebAIM). These will instantly flag for example missing alt-text or contrast errors.

Step 2: Manual Simulation. Spend 10 minutes navigating your site with a screen reader like the free NVDA - Non Visual Desktop Access for Windows or VoiceOver on Mac (by pressing Command-F5) or using only your keyboard. You will quickly spot logical errors that automated tools miss.

Step 3: User-Centred Feedback. The most effective way to identify barriers is to involve Persons with Disabilities in the testing process. Collaborate with local disability associations to gather

real-world feedback on your booking systems and virtual exhibits. The "Nothing about us without us" principle is the gold standard (UNCRPD, 2006).

By embedding these small changes now, you ensure your institution's website is not just legally compliant, but truly welcoming to everyone.

From Audit to Action: Your Implementation Plan

Completing an accessibility audit gives you a list of issues. The next step is to fix them. This action plan focuses on two core, high-impact strategies that address both technical and cognitive accessibility, these are:

1. Adopt a "Text-First" Approach for All Content. Ensure every piece of information has a clear, text-based foundation. This means:

- ▶ Writing descriptive alt-text for all meaningful images.
- ▶ Providing accurate captions and full transcripts for all audio and video.
- ▶ Using text labels alongside icons.
- ▶ Ensuring all interactive functions are described in text.

2. Apply the "Plain Language & Clear Structure" Rule to All Digital Writing. Rewrite and structure your online content to be understood on the first read. This means:

- ▶ Using the active voice and short sentences.
- ▶ Defining jargon immediately.
- ▶ Organising content with clear headings, bullet points, and ample space.
- ▶ Using visuals to support the text, not replace it.

How do we make information clear? Use Plain Language.
As mentioned in the previous subsection, Plain Language is a way of writing that is direct and easy to read. It is not "dumbed down". It is respectful and clear.

Here are the main rules

1. Use short sentences.

Instead of: "The artist, who was profoundly influenced by the political turmoil of the early 20th century, developed a style characterised by fragmented forms and a muted colour palette".
Try: "The artist lived in a time of great political change. This influenced his work. His style uses broken shapes and soft colours".

2. Use active verbs.

Instead of: "The sculpture was created by the artist in 1952".
Try: "The artist created this sculpture in 1952".

3. Avoid jargon.

Jargon are special words only experts know. If you must use a complex term, explain it right away.
Instead of: "This is a fine example of chiaroscuro".
Try: "This painting uses chiaroscuro. This means the artist used strong light and dark shadows to create drama".

4. Structure your content clearly.

Use headings and subheadings (like in this text).
Use bullet points for lists.
Leave plenty of white space. Do not crowd the text.

5. Support text with visuals.

Use clear icons next to important information (like a wheelchair for access, or a clock for opening times).

Use simple, helpful pictures and diagrams to explain ideas.

Why this matters?

These simple steps are about respect. They make sure everyone can use and enjoy your website.

Good colour contrast and keyboard navigation help people who:

- ▶ Have low vision or are colour blind.
- ▶ Use a keyboard instead of a mouse.

Clear, plain language helps people who:

- ▶ Are neurodivergent (like autistic people).
- ▶ Have a learning disability.
- ▶ Are not fluent in the language.
- ▶ Are tired or in a hurry.

When you do both, you remove barriers. You create one experience that works for all people. Your website becomes a useful tool, not a locked door. You show that every visitor – regardless of how they see, move, or think – is welcome here.

Summary

This chapter helps you make your website and digital content accessible. Digital access is a human right and a legal duty under the European Accessibility Act by 2025.

Key Takeaways:

Your Website is a "Digital Front Door". For people with sensory disabilities, it is the main tool to plan a visit, buy a ticket, or explore an exhibit. If it is not accessible, you lock them out.

Follow the Four POUR Principles. Your digital content must be:

- ▶ **Perceivable** (available in more than one way, like with text and sound).
- ▶ **Operable** (usable with a keyboard, not just a mouse).
- ▶ **Understandable** (written in clear, plain language).
- ▶ **Robust** (works with current and future assistive technologies).

Start with Simple "Nudges". You do not need to be an expert. Check colour contrast, write good image descriptions (alt-text), ensure keyboard navigation works, and provide transcripts for videos.

Use the 3-Step Framework.

Step 1: Use free automated tools to find errors.

Step 2: Test your site yourself with a keyboard or screen reader.

Step 3: Get feedback directly from people with disabilities. Their experience is the best guide.

Commit to Plain Language. Write short sentences, use active verbs, and explain difficult terms. Clear writing helps everyone, including tourists, neurodivergent people, and those with learning disabilities. By taking these steps, you move beyond legal compliance.

You create a welcoming digital space where everyone in your community can participate independently and with dignity.

Glossary

Alt-Text (Alternative Text)

A short, written description added to an image online. Screen reading software reads this description aloud for people who are blind or have low vision. Good alt-text describes the purpose or key details of the image.

Plain Language

A way of writing that is direct, clear, and easy to understand on the first read. It uses short sentences, active verbs, and defines any complex terms. It is not "dumbed down"; it is respectful and inclusive.

Screen Reader

Assistive software used primarily by people who are blind or have low vision. It converts text and other on-screen elements (like buttons and images with alt-text) into synthesised speech or braille.

Text-to-Speech (TTS)

A type of assistive technology that reads digital text aloud. It is often a feature within screen readers, but is also used as a standalone tool to help people with dyslexia, low vision, or other reading difficulties.

WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines)

The international set of technical standards for making web content accessible to people with disabilities. The guidelines are built on the four POUR principles. The European Accessibility Act (EAA) references these standards.

Universal Design (UD)

The design of products, environments, and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation. In digital accessibility, it means building websites that work for everyone from the start.

6. Multisensory Storytelling and Exhibition Design

Context

Museums, art galleries, and libraries are important public spaces. They are places where people can learn, reflect, and feel part of a shared cultural life. They help people understand objects, stories, traditions, and ideas that shape communities. They also create opportunities for dialogue, curiosity, and connection. For this reason, culture should be open to everyone, without barriers.

Following the objectives of the Culture for All Guide, this chapter aims to raise awareness about accessibility and to show that inclusion is not an extra feature, but a basic part of good museum practice. It encourages museums to think carefully about the needs of all visitors, including persons with sensory disabilities, older people, children, and anyone who may need clearer information, better orientation, or additional support during their visit.

When an exhibition is designed with the needs of people with sensory impairments in mind, it becomes better for everyone. Clear information, thoughtful use of space, and accessible design help visitors feel more comfortable, confident, and welcome.

Creating this kind of experience starts with museum staff. Curators, designers, educators, front-of-house staff, and gallery attendants all have an important role. They need to understand the barriers

some visitors may face and work together to remove them with care and respect.

What Multisensory Storytelling & Design mean?

Multisensory storytelling and design mean that an exhibition should be understood through more than one sensory channel. Visitors should not have to rely on sight alone. They should be able to follow the story through sound, touch, clear text, and easy spatial orientation. This approach starts from a simple idea: people experience the world in different ways. Some visitors mainly use sight to understand information. Others rely more on hearing, touch, movement, or a combination of senses. When museums recognise this from the beginning of the design process, they create exhibitions that are easier to use.

This is especially important for persons with sensory disabilities. A blind or low-vision visitor may need touch, audio description, and a clear route through the space. A deaf or hard-of-hearing visitor may need captions, transcripts, sign language support, and strong visual cues. A visitor with sensory processing differences may need quieter spaces, fewer sudden effects, and more control over sound, light, or interaction. Multisensory design helps museums respond to these different needs in a practical way. It is not an extra feature that can be added after the exhibition is finished.

This approach is closely linked to Universal Design. Universal Design means planning spaces, services, and information so that as many people as possible can use them from the start. In museums, this means identifying barriers early and reducing them before the exhibition opens. It also means helping visitors move through the space with independence, comfort, and dignity. They should be able

to follow the story and use the available tools without unnecessary difficulty. This also matches current European accessibility principles, which support providing information through more than one channel. In practice, this means offering clear alternatives instead of one fixed way to access content.

In museum practice, multisensory storytelling means giving visitors more than one way to access the same content. For example, a wall label can be paired with audio, a sculpture can be explored through touch and spoken description, and a sound installation can include captions and a transcript. A route can also be supported by a raised map, clear signs, and staff guidance. The aim is to help more visitors understand the exhibition in different ways and at their own pace.

Multisensory storytelling also improves the overall design of the exhibition. It encourages museum staff to think more carefully about layout, clarity, and sensory flow. Visitors need to know where to begin, where to go next, and where they can pause. Tactile elements should be placed at a reachable height. Audio points should be easy to find. Important information should be short, clear, and available in more than one format. These choices support accessibility, but they also make the visit easier and more engaging for everyone.

In this way, multisensory storytelling and design are not only about accessibility. They are also about better communication, better use of space, and a better visitor experience. When museums use more than one sensory channel and plan the exhibition with care, they create spaces that are clearer, richer, and more inclusive for all.

Beyond Sight: Incorporating Tactile and Auditory Elements

You should not design an exhibition for sight only. You should design it so visitors can follow the story through touch, sound, text, and clear spatial guidance. A basic rule of accessibility is to provide information through more than one sensory channel. This means that visitors should have more than one way to reach the same content. If one sensory channel is not available or is difficult for a visitor, another one should support access.

This approach is important for people with sensory disabilities. But it also improves the visit for many other people. Clear information in different formats helps visitors feel more confident and included. This is especially useful when an exhibition is complex, busy, or unfamiliar.

This does not mean adding many effects to every room. It means that each important part of the exhibition should offer at least two ways to understand it. For example, you can pair a short wall text with audio, a tactile copy with spoken description, or sound with captions and transcript. The goal is simple. Every visitor should be able to reach the main story, even if one sensory channel does not work for them.

You should begin with spatial exhibition design. A clear sensory experience starts with a clear route. The visitor needs to understand where to begin, where to go next, and where to stop and rest. At the entrance, provide a simple orientation point. This can include a map, a short explanation of the route, and information about areas with strong sound, bright light, smell, tactile stations, or interactive activity. If possible, offer two route options: a calm route and a standard route. This gives visitors more

control over the level of stimulation they want to experience. Audio points should be in predictable places, so visitors do not need to search for them. It is also useful to place rest points between the more intense parts of the exhibition. Sensory maps are a practical and low-cost tool for this type of planning. They help visitors prepare for the visit and help staff communicate the sensory flow of the space in a simple way (Cieslik 2024).

People with sensory disabilities should not appear only at the testing stage. You should involve them from the start as co-creators. Ask them to help review the route, test prototypes, and decide what information is essential. Good practice in accessible design is to involve end users early and throughout the process. In museum projects, participatory design means they are not simple testers, but active participants in needs analysis and design proposals (EBU good practice for accessibility 2021-2022; EIDD Stockholm Declaration).

You can do this work with a small budget. Start with a few strong touch points instead of many expensive installations. Use material samples, embossed cards, raised-line maps, handcrafted replicas, and audio on visitors' own phones through QR codes. Simple tactile maps can be made with string, glue, and other textured materials. Use 3D printing when you already have access to a printer or a local partner and need repeated copies. Use handcrafted replicas when texture and material feel matter most. In both cases, ask blind and low-vision co-creators to test the result before you install it.

As shown in the diagram **"Holistic Multisensory Storytelling"**, the exhibition uses five sensory channels. Sight includes large print and high contrast. Sound includes audio description and adjustable

volume. Touch includes tactile models, replicas, and raised maps. Smell includes scent examples and natural materials. Taste includes safe tasting experiences. Together, these channels improve access and help create a more inclusive and engaging exhibition.

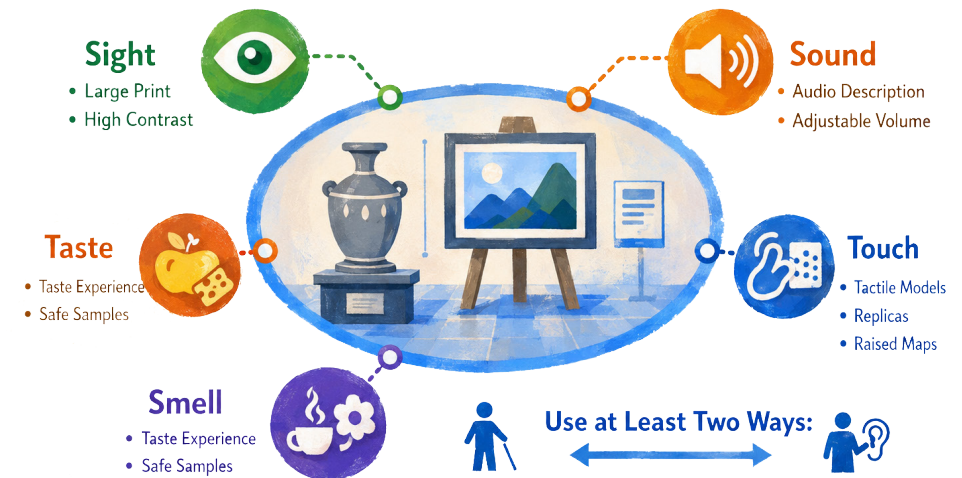


Figure 1. Diagram illustrating a holistic multisensory approach to museum interpretation and visitor engagement (Source: AI-generated image, created by SenseAble Culture project for illustrative purposes, 2026). **Alt text:** Infographic illustrating a holistic multisensory storytelling approach in a museum. At the centre, a museum display with a sculpture, a painting, and an information panel is surrounded by five sensory channels: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. Each channel is represented by an icon and examples of accessibility features, including large print and high contrast for vision; audio description and adjustable volume for hearing; tactile models, reproductions, and tactile maps for touch; safe scent experiences for smell; and safe tasting experiences for taste. A message at the bottom encourages using at least two sensory modalities to enhance accessibility and visitor engagement.

Designing for Sensory Regulation and Avoiding Overload

You should plan for sensory regulation from the first design sketch, not at the end of the project. A museum visit should be welcoming, clear, and manageable for all visitors. Too much light, noise, movement, smell, or visual activity can make an exhibition stressful. This can affect autistic visitors, people with sensory processing differences, people with sensory disabilities, older visitors, children, and many other people as well. Good sensory design does not only help one group. It improves the visit for everyone (European Accessibility Act).

A practical first step is to think about sensory flow across the whole exhibition. Visitors should be able to understand the route easily and feel that they have some control over their experience. One of the simplest and most affordable tools you can add is a sensory map. This can be a printed map, a wall panel, or a digital version. It should show where stimulation is high, where it is low, and where visitors can sit, rest, or change route.

To make sensory regulation part of exhibition design, you should include a few clear measures:

- ▶ **Provide a place to rest.** Visitors may need a quiet space to pause and recover. This does not have to be large or expensive. It can be a quiet corner, a bench area, or a separate room. What matters is that it is easy to find and easy to use. Mark it clearly on the sensory map and with visible signs. Place it close to high-stimulation areas. Add simple seating and clear information so visitors know they can rest there.
- ▶ **Keep sound, light, and smell at moderate levels whenever possible.** Avoid sudden changes in lighting, repeated background noise, and effects that start without warning. If an installation includes loud sound, flashing images, strong scent, or vibration, tell visitors before they enter that space. A short warning at the entrance, on the map, and on the label can help visitors prepare and decide whether they want to continue.
- ▶ **Allow visitors to adjust their own sensory input whenever possible.** For example, allow them to change the volume, pause audio, skip tracks, or choose whether to activate sound, scent, or digital effects. User control is not an extra feature. It is a basic accessibility measure. When people can choose their own

pace and level of stimulation, they can engage more confidently and for longer (Avni et al. 2025).

- ▶ **You do not need a large budget to provide useful support.** You can lend noise-reducing headphones or ear defenders, provide disposable headset covers, support the use of personal devices, and prepare small sensory kits. These kits can include simple and affordable items such as tinted overlays, fidget tools, or clear route cards. Keep them at the entrance or information desk and explain clearly how visitors can borrow them.
- ▶ **Train front-of-house staff.** Staff should learn how to respond respectfully and calmly, and how to ask visitors what support they need. They should be able to explain route choices, point out quiet spaces, describe sensory warnings, and help visitors use available tools. Whenever possible, involve disabled trainers, advisors, and co-creators in this training. Their experience can help staff understand real needs and avoid making assumptions.

Implementation Strategies, Solutions and Action Plans

Curators, exhibition designers, technicians, and architects should follow a small set of clear actions. Technology will continue to change, but the main tasks stay the same. You need a route that is easy to follow, information that is easy to access, and sensory choices that visitors can control. This work should not be done by museum staff alone. You should involve local disability groups and

individual co-creators from the first planning meeting to the final on-site test. Their experience can help you avoid barriers and make better decisions from the start.

- ▶ Offer narration through at least two channels. A basic combination is audio, written text, and captioned video. If you use video, add sign language where possible. Keep written text short, clear, and direct. Use plain language, large print, and high contrast.
- ▶ Add tactile and smell elements with care. These elements should be optional and directly linked to the object or story. Good low-cost options include textured panels, material swatches, clay forms, embossed cards, handcrafted replicas, and small scent samples that visitors can choose to open.
- ▶ Use tactile objects to explain process, not only shape. Select a sequence of objects that visitors can follow by hand and ear. For example, show raw material, tool, half-finished object, and final object in one line. Keep the objects close together and support them with short audio description.
- ▶ Keep the exhibition engaging but not overwhelming. Separate quiet spaces from active zones. Warn visitors about triggers. Reduce background noise where speech or listening matters.
- ▶ Create one active interaction area where visitors can handle replicas or material samples. Keep instructions short. Use durable objects. If budget is limited, a small table with 3 to 5 carefully chosen items is better than a large but confusing interactive zone (NEMO toolkit).

Examples:

- ▶ History & Archaeology Museums: Design one exhibition zone as a clear sensory sequence. You can recreate part of a medieval house with a table, wood tools, pottery, and samples of wool, linen, and hemp. Let visitors touch a small number of objects. Add one optional sound track with fire and wind, and one optional smell sample such as burned wood. Keep the written, audio, and video guidance focused on what the visitor should notice first, second, and third. If your budget is small, one table with 4 materials, 1 replica, and 1 short audio track is enough.



Figure 2. Visitor exploring tactile models in a museum (Source: AI-generated image, created by SenseAble Culture project for illustrative purposes, 2026).

Alt text: A blind visitor sits at a wooden table in a museum exhibition space designed as a tactile sequence about medieval living space. The image shows how tactile objects and audio can explain a process step by step, helping visitors follow the story through touch and sound.

- ▶ Art Galleries: Provide textured reproductions of selected paintings or sculptures with short written and audio guidance. Next to each work, offer a small folder or tray with textures linked to the image, such as fabric, metal, wood, or stone. For a portrait, you can include fabric similar to the clothing, a jewellery shape, or a small object shown in the work. If your budget is limited, start with one tactile detail from each artwork rather than a full reproduction.

Summary

Accessibility must be planned from the start. Multisensory storytelling means that visitors should be able to understand the exhibition through more than one sensory channel, such as sight, sound, touch, and clear spatial orientation.

Good design helps everyone. Measures made for persons with sensory disabilities also improve the visit for older people, children, and visitors who need clearer information, calmer spaces, or more support.

Spatial and sensory flow are essential. Visitors need a clear route, predictable audio points, reachable tactile objects, rest areas, and warnings before strong sound, light, smell, or movement. Sensory maps and quiet spaces are practical low-cost tools.

People with sensory disabilities should be co-creators. They should help review the route, test prototypes, and decide what information is most important. This leads to better and more useful solutions. Practical solutions can be low-cost. Museums can use captions, transcripts, audio guides, tactile replicas, raised maps, material samples, QR codes, and small interaction tables. A few well-designed access points are better than many confusing effects.

Glossary

Audio Description

A spoken narration that describes visual information (like artwork, artifacts, or scenes) for people who are blind or have low vision.

Tactile Model

A three-dimensional or raised version of an object, image, or artwork designed to be touched.

Sensory Regulation

The process of managing sensory input – such as light, sound, smells, textures, or movement – to help a person feel comfortable, focused, and able to participate in an environment or activity.

Exhibition Design

The interdisciplinary practice of planning and shaping exhibition environments in order to communicate content, interpret collections, and structure visitor experience through spatial, visual, and sensory means.

7. Staff Training Communication & Accessible Service Protocols

Context

In the previous chapters, you learned about accessibility at different levels – from sensory accessibility and Universal Design to a human-centred approach, the accessibility chain, digital environments, and multisensory exhibition design. These principles help you create an accessible environment. However, even the best-planned environment does not, on its own, guarantee an inclusive experience. Accessibility becomes real when you communicate with visitors and support them in using the space. You are the part of the system that turns a designed environment into a real visitor experience.

Staff are the "living accessibility infrastructure" of a cultural organisation – the part that connects the physical, digital, and content environment with the visitor's real experience. Poor communication, fixed assumptions, or unclear service protocols can create barriers, even in an accessible environment. Calm, professional, and respectful behaviour helps to remove them. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, access to culture is a human right (United Nations, 2006). This means your role includes both supporting an accessible environment and following clear, agreed steps for

service. In this chapter, you will learn how to communicate in an inclusive way, better understand different needs, and use clear service protocols in your daily work.

Why Staff Determine the Quality of Accessibility

Universal Design removes barriers at the planning stage so that more people can use the environment. However, accessibility becomes real through interaction between people. In this process, you play a key role.

Even the best Universal Design solutions cannot remove every barrier if staff do not know how to respond. A blind visitor may find the entrance but feel lost without orientation support. A deaf visitor may buy a ticket online but face difficulties if staff cannot communicate in writing or with simple visual signs. A visitor with autism may want to experience an exhibition slowly, in a quiet space; if staff do not recognise the signs of sensory overload, the situation can become difficult.

These situations are usually not caused by bad intentions. They come from a lack of knowledge and confidence. That is why your skills are a practical continuation of Universal Design – they help ensure that the planned solutions also work in real life. You should also see visitors as active participants, not only as service users. Their feedback and choices help improve accessibility in practice.

From a Charity Approach to a Rights-Based Approach

In the past, people with disabilities were often offered help as an act of charity. Although usually well meant, this approach can create unequal relationships and reduce a person's independence. Today, the approach is based on human rights. Access to culture is a right, not a privilege. Your role is not to "help", but to ensure equal and respectful conditions for taking part in cultural life. You should:

- ▶ speak to the person, not about them;
- ▶ ask if support is needed, rather than assume it;
- ▶ respect a refusal of support;
- ▶ adapt your communication while keeping respect and professionalism.

Respect and independence are the central principles.

Attitudinal Barriers – The Invisible Obstacle

Physical barriers are visible and can be measured. Attitudinal barriers are harder to notice, but just as important. They can appear as overprotection, avoiding communication, speaking to a companion instead of the visitor, or low tolerance towards different behaviour.

These situations can create a feeling of exclusion, even in an environment that meets accessibility standards. That is why sensory accessibility and a human-centred approach are not complete without your awareness and reflection on your own attitudes.

A Human-Centred Approach in Service

A human-centred service means you see the visitor as a person, not as a diagnosis. Two people with the same disability may have very different needs. The key questions are:

- ▶ What does this person need right now?
- ▶ How can I provide information in a clear way?
- ▶ How can I support the person's independence?

Sometimes a clear description of the space or extra time is enough. In other cases, working together as a team is needed.

Benefits for All Visitors

Inclusive communication and a predictable environment improve the experience for many visitors, not only people with disabilities. Clear information also helps visitors who do not speak the local language well, older visitors, families with children, and people who feel anxious in unfamiliar places. A flexible and respectful approach strengthens the overall quality of the service.

That is why your skills are not only a question for one small group of visitors – they are a quality standard for the whole organisation. In the following sections, you will learn how to apply accessibility in your daily work, in different types of cultural settings, including museums, libraries, theatres, and community cultural centres.

Understanding Sensory Disabilities and Inclusive Communication

Universal Design removes barriers at the planning stage so that services and environments can be used by as many people as possible. This applies not only to physical infrastructure or digital solutions, but also to communication. Providing information through different channels – visual, audio, written, or tactile – is a key principle of an inclusive environment. This approach is also in line with European Union accessibility rules (European Union, 2019) and with the latest WCAG standards, which ask for information to be presented in a perceivable and understandable form.

Sensory disabilities can affect vision, hearing, or how sensory information is processed. They can be present from birth, develop later in life, or appear with age. Disability is not the same for everyone. Not all people with visual impairments are completely blind. Not all people with hearing impairments use sign language. People with autism may also have very different needs. That is why you should base your communication on questions and respect, not on assumptions.

Communication with People with Visual Impairments

People with visual impairments may use a white cane, a guide dog, or other orientation tools. You should:

- ▶ speak directly to the person, not to their companion;
- ▶ introduce yourself and your role;
- ▶ offer support, but do not force it;
- ▶ if you offer guidance, let the person hold your elbow rather than taking their arm;
- ▶ give a clear and specific description of the space (for example: "On your right is the information desk. In front of you, about five

metres away, there are stairs").

Avoid general directions such as "over there" or "this way". They do not support independence or a sense of safety.

Communication with People with Hearing Impairments

People with hearing impairments may use hearing aids, cochlear implants, lip reading, or sign language. You should:

- ▶ face the person and keep your face and lips visible;
- ▶ avoid speaking too loudly or exaggerating your speech;
- ▶ use clear and simple language;
- ▶ offer written communication if needed;
- ▶ give enough time for responses.

If a sign language interpreter is present, you should still speak directly to the visitor. The interpreter is there to support communication, not to replace the person.

Communication with People with Sensory Processing Differences

People with autism or other sensory processing differences may be more sensitive to sound, light, smells, or unexpected situations. In these situations, you should:

- ▶ speak in a calm and steady tone;
- ▶ give short and clear instructions;
- ▶ explain what will happen next;
- ▶ offer a quieter space if possible;
- ▶ respect personal space.

If a visitor seems anxious, remember that this may be a reaction to sensory overload, not unwillingness to cooperate.

Key Principles of Inclusive Communication

In any situation, your communication should follow these principles:

- ▶ ask questions, do not assume;
- ▶ provide information in more than one way;
- ▶ stay calm and respectful;
- ▶ check that the person has understood the information;
- ▶ respect the person’s choices and pace.

Systemic Importance

Understanding sensory disabilities is not only an individual skill. It is part of an organisational approach in which Universal Design, sensory accessibility, and a human-centred approach are applied in the daily work of staff. Through clear and professional communication, you help build trust, reduce anxiety, and ensure equal access to cultural experiences.

As shown in the model below, inclusive communication is based on using different channels and adapting your approach to each visitor.



Figure 1. Model of Inclusive Communication (Source: AI-generated image, created by SenseAble Culture project for illustrative purposes, 2026).

Alt text: At the centre of the diagram is a stylised human figure labelled "Visitor". Around the figure, four information channels are arranged in a circle and connected with arrows that show interaction and multi-channel communication. In the upper left is the "Visual Channel" with an eye symbol; it stands for visual information such as signs, images, pictograms, and visual signals. In the upper right is the "Audio Channel" with an ear symbol; it stands for spoken information, audio announcements, and sound signals. In the lower left is the "Written Channel" with a document and pencil symbol; it stands for written information such as texts, instructions, and subtitles. In the lower right is the "Tactile and Spatial Channel" with a hand symbol and directional arrows; it stands for tactile maps, tactile signs, and orientation through touch. Below the visitor figure is a bar labelled "Staff Adaptation and Questioning". This shows that staff assess the situation, ask questions, and adapt how information is provided to the visitor’s needs.

Accessible Service Protocols and Consistent Practice

Inclusive communication is essential, but it is not enough on its own. To ensure a consistent and professional approach for all visitors, accessibility must be part of the organisation's daily work. This means having clear, written service protocols that all staff know and use.

A service protocol is not a strict script. It is a shared guide that helps staff act in a consistent and respectful way in different situations. Protocols are a tool for putting Universal Design into daily practice. They support coordinated action, reduce improvisation, and prevent very different responses from different staff members. A clear structure creates a sense of safety for both visitors and staff.

Standard Welcome Protocol

The first contact often shapes the whole visitor experience. That is why you should use a consistent welcome approach with all visitors, whether they arrive at a museum information desk, a library counter, a theatre foyer, or the entrance of a community cultural centre. You should:

- ▶ greet the visitor directly and respectfully;
- ▶ introduce your role when appropriate;
- ▶ briefly explain available services (for example, orientation, a quiet space, or assistance);
- ▶ ask if additional information or support is needed;
- ▶ communicate clearly and simply.

You should not assume whether a person needs support or not.

Instead, create an environment where support is available and can be requested safely.

Orientation Protocol

Visitors with visual impairments, anxiety, or those who do not know the space well may need extra support to understand the environment. This applies in any setting, from a large museum to a small community cultural centre. The orientation protocol should include:

- ▶ a short and structured description of the space (entrance, exits, toilets, lifts);
- ▶ information about stairs, thresholds, narrow passages, or other obstacles;
- ▶ directions to rest areas or quiet spaces;
- ▶ information about where staff can be found if support is needed;
- ▶ an offer to guide the person if they wish.

A consistent approach to orientation helps reduce stress, supports independence, and builds trust in the organisation.

Sensory Regulation Support Protocol

Cultural spaces often include sound, light, movement, and crowds. For some visitors, this can lead to sensory overload. In a theatre, this may happen during a loud scene; in a library, during a busy event; in a community cultural centre, during a festival. You should have a clear approach for these situations. The protocol should include:

- ▶ the option to move to a quieter or less active space;

- ▶ the option to reduce sound or visual input, if possible;
- ▶ calm and structured communication;
- ▶ time for the person to recover, without pressure to continue the visit;
- ▶ coordinated team action if the situation needs it.

Do not leave the person alone without explanation, but also do not take control of the situation more than needed. The goal is to keep respect and a sense of safety.

Complaint and Incident Handling Protocol

If a visitor reports an accessibility issue, see this as a chance to improve the service. You should:

- ▶ listen without becoming defensive or trying to justify the situation;
- ▶ apologise for what has happened;
- ▶ identify what can be improved at that moment;
- ▶ document the case for further analysis;
- ▶ share the information with the responsible person or management.

Complaints are not an attack on staff. They are a valuable source of feedback.

Emergency Situation Protocol

In evacuation and safety situations, accessibility is especially important. You should have a clear approach that includes:

- ▶ giving clear and easy-to-understand instructions;

- ▶ supporting people with sensory disabilities;
- ▶ explaining safe areas and evacuation routes;
- ▶ staying calm and communicating in a consistent way;
- ▶ cooperating effectively as a team.

You should organise regular training sessions and simulations so that actions in emergency situations are not improvised.

From Empathy to an Organisational Standard

Clear protocols ensure that accessibility does not depend on the personal experience, beliefs, or empathy of an individual staff member. Consistent action builds trust, reduces uncertainty, and creates a safe environment for all visitors. This makes accessibility a natural part of daily work – a quality standard for the whole organisation, not a separate task.

Implementation Strategies, Solutions and Action Plans

To ensure that staff training and service protocols do not stay only as theoretical documents, you need a clear and structured approach to put them into practice. Accessibility should be set as a professional standard of the organisation, not as a separate initiative. This section presents practical steps that help apply the principles described above in everyday work.

A. Strategy Checklist

To strengthen an accessible service culture, you should:

- ▶ introduce mandatory accessibility training for all staff. The training should include both theory about sensory disabilities and communication, and practical situations and case analysis.
- ▶ develop and regularly update written service protocols. Document the steps for welcoming visitors, orientation, sensory regulation support, incident handling, and emergency situations.
- ▶ organise simulations and role-play exercises. Practice helps build skills, reduce uncertainty, and support consistent team action.
- ▶ appoint a person or coordinator responsible for accessibility. This person follows the use of protocols, collects feedback, and coordinates training.
- ▶ set up regular evaluation. Analyse incidents and visitor feedback to keep improving accessibility practice.

These steps make sure that accessibility does not depend on the personal initiative of individual staff members, but is built into the structure of the organisation.

B. Applying Strategies in Different Cultural Settings

Below are examples of how the strategies in Section A can be applied in different cultural settings.

In a Museum

The museum has introduced mandatory accessibility training for all staff and developed a written orientation protocol. At the information desk, a staff member greets a visitor with a white cane, introduces themselves, and offers a short overview of the space. The staff member gives a structured description of the exhibition areas and explains where the lift, toilets, and quiet space are. As shown in Figure 2, the museum also provides a tactile floor plan, so the visitor can explore the spatial layout independently through

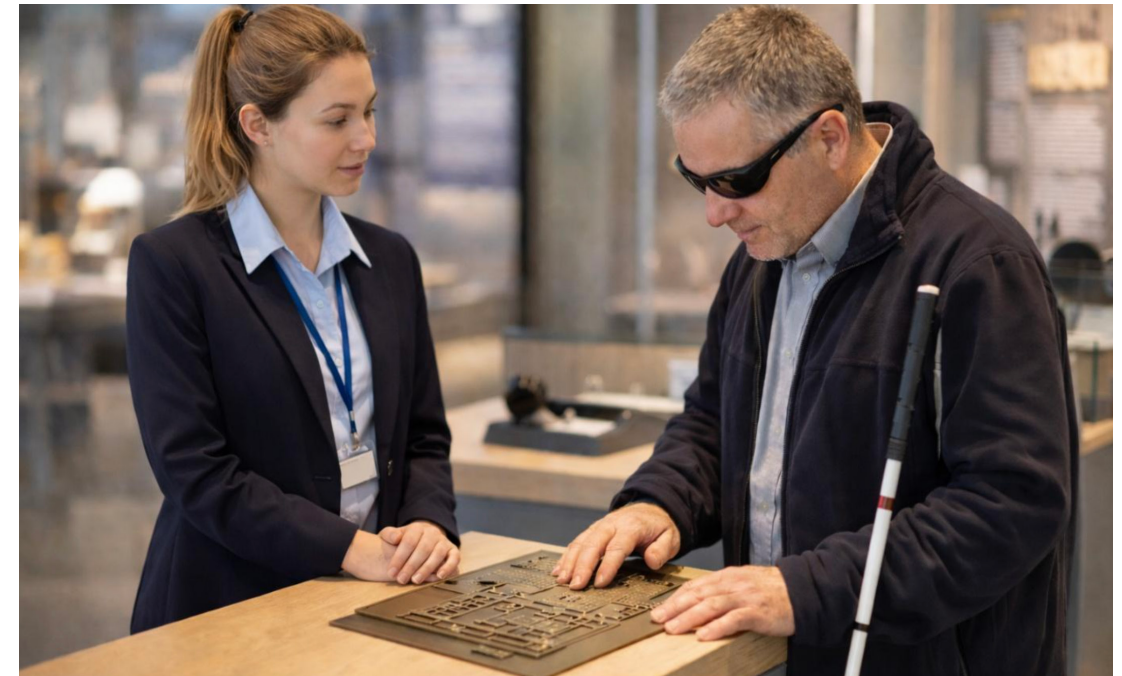


Figure 2. A museum staff member provides orientation support to a visitor with a visual impairment, using a tactile floor plan (Source: AI-generated image, created by SenseAble Culture project for illustrative purposes, 2026).

Alt text: A museum information area with a wooden desk. Behind the desk stands a staff member wearing a dark jacket and an ID badge. She watches the visitor calmly and listens. The visitor is a man with short grey hair, dark glasses, and a white cane resting against the edge of the desk. With both hands, he explores a tactile metal floor plan placed on the desk. The plan shows the spatial layout through raised lines and elements designed for touch. The staff member does not guide his hands but stands nearby, ready to give a verbal explanation if needed. The situation shows calm, professional, and multi-channel orientation support in a museum.

touch. If the visitor wishes, the staff member offers to guide them to the first exhibition area, allowing the visitor to hold their elbow. This keeps the visitor's independence.

This approach shows:

- ▶ a clearly written orientation protocol in use;
- ▶ information provided through multiple channels (verbal and tactile);
- ▶ consistent action by trained staff;
- ▶ respectful and professional communication.

In a Theatre

The theatre has appointed an accessibility coordinator who oversees training and regularly updates service protocols. Before the performance, the support team informs the audience about the length of the show, the breaks, and any sound or lighting effects that may be strong.

If a visitor experiences sensory overload, staff know where the quiet space is and how to offer a short break without drawing attention from other visitors. When needed, they give clear, structured information about how and when it is safe to return to the auditorium. As shown in Figure 3, a staff member calmly offers headphones and keeps a respectful distance.



Figure 3. A theatre staff member supports a visitor during a sensory overload situation (Source: AI-generated image, created by SenseAble Culture project for illustrative purposes, 2026).

Alt text: A theatre hall during a performance. In the background, actors and bright stage lighting are visible, and visitors sit in rows. In the foreground, a visitor is covering their ears and looks distressed. Next to them stands a staff member with an ID badge, holding headphones and offering them to the visitor. The staff member keeps a calm posture and a small distance, without touching the visitor. The situation shows respectful and professional support during a sensory overload situation.

This example shows:

- ▶ a defined sensory regulation support protocol;
- ▶ staff able to manage the situation calmly;
- ▶ consistent communication without assumptions;
- ▶ coordination at the organisational level.

In a Library

The library runs regular simulations and role-play exercises for staff. At the information desk, staff provide information both verbally and in written form. The space includes clearly marked quiet space with reduced lighting and lower noise levels. If a visitor shows signs of being overwhelmed, the staff member follows a learned approach: reducing the intensity of communication, offering a quieter space, and giving short, structured instructions. As shown in Figure 4, the staff member calmly points the visitor towards a quiet study area.



Figure 4. A library staff member helps a visitor find a quieter place for studying (Source: AI-generated image, created by SenseAble Culture project for illustrative purposes, 2026).

Alt text: A library with bookshelves and large windows. In the foreground, a visitor holds several books and looks at a staff member. The staff member, wearing an ID badge, stands at a short distance and calmly points towards a quieter space nearby. Behind them, the entrance to the quiet area is visible, with tables and a lamp. The situation shows how the staff member provides clear and calm orientation, helping the visitor find a suitable place for studying.

This example shows:

- ▶ regular training and evaluation supporting consistent practice;
- ▶ multi-channel information at the service point;
- ▶ a clear sensory regulation approach in daily work;
- ▶ respectful and calm orientation support.

Summary

You put accessibility into practice. Even the best Universal Design solutions do not work without trained and confident staff.

Accessibility is a rights-based approach, not charity. Your role is not to "help", but to ensure equal, respectful, and professional conditions.

Inclusive communication uses more than one channel. Provide information visually, audibly, in writing, or through touch – depending on the situation.

Clear protocols support consistent action. Written, agreed approaches reduce improvisation and build trust.

Accessibility is an organisational quality standard. Regular training, evaluation, and clear responsibility ensure a sustainable approach.

Glossary

Accessibility coordinator

A designated person within an organisation who oversees the use of accessibility measures, coordinates staff training, and supports continuous improvement of accessibility practice.

Attitudinal barriers

Invisible obstacles that come from stereotypes, assumptions, or lack of awareness, and that can limit participation even in a physically accessible environment.

Living accessibility infrastructure

A way to describe staff as a key element of accessibility, showing that inclusion is created not only through technical solutions but also through human skills, attitudes, and actions.

Sensory disability

A functional limitation that affects vision, hearing, or the processing of sensory information, and that can change how a person perceives, interprets, or responds to the surrounding environment.

Inclusive communication

An approach to communicating that ensures information is available in accessible, understandable, and usable formats for the widest possible range of people. It combines principles of accessibility, plain language, and universal design to remove communication barriers and promote equal participation for all.

Service protocol

A written and agreed approach for specific situations that helps staff act in a consistent, professional, and inclusive way, regardless of an individual staff member's experience.

8. Evaluation, Feedback, and Continuous Improvement Mechanisms

Context

Welcome to Chapter 8. This section provides you with a strategic roadmap to help your library, theatre, or museum transition from a "passive provider" to a proactive inclusive space. By establishing robust mechanisms for assessment, you ensure your institution acts to remove barriers before they become obstacles for your visitors.

Your Primary Objectives:

- **Enhance Staff Awareness:** Addressing attitudinal barriers through continuous evaluation.
- **Practical Application:** Using the Accessibility Pre-Planning Checklist (Self-Assessment Checklist) as a foundation for your long-term improvement plan.

Through regular evaluation, you will identify existing gaps and take actionable steps towards creating a cultural environment where every visitor feels they truly belong.

A Nuanced Understanding of Barriers within Cultural Spaces

To truly improve your institution, you must first understand that disability is not an inherent trait of an individual. Instead, it is a result of the interaction between people and the barriers – physical, digital, or attitudinal – imposed by society. When you remove these barriers, you create equality.

If you work in a cultural space, you should view accessibility not just as a set of rules, but as a rights-based approach. This means you have a responsibility to identify and remove obstacles so that every visitor can participate with dignity.

The "Curb-Cut Effect" and Universal Design (UD)

As introduced in Chapter 2, Universal Design (UD) is the practice of creating environments, products, and services that are usable by all people without the need for specialised adaptation. A classic example is the "curb-cut effect": ramps cut into sidewalks were originally designed for wheelchair users, yet they benefit everyone – parents with strollers, travellers with heavy luggage, and the elderly.

In your cultural context, applying UD principles means shifting your mindset from "accommodating a minority" to "designing for everyone". For example, providing exhibition texts in Plain Language is essential for people with cognitive disabilities, but it also helps tourists who speak other languages and students learning new topics. By making the "ramp" an invisible, integral part of your initial design, you enhance the experience for every visitor.



Figure 1. Illustration of the curb-cut effect and the broad benefits of inclusive design. (Source: AI-generated image, created by SenseAble Culture project for illustrative purposes, 2026).

Alt text: Illustration of a curb ramp branching into several paths leading to different people. A wheelchair user, a parent pushing a stroller, a traveller pulling a suitcase, and a delivery worker pushing a trolley all benefit from the accessible route. An accessibility symbol appears above the paths, highlighting how one accessibility feature can support many different users.

The Rationale for Proactivity: The Accessibility Chain

Waiting for a visitor to complain is a reactive failure; by the time someone complains, they have already experienced exclusion. Continuous evaluation allows you to be proactive by identifying the "Accessibility Chain".

This chain is a sequence of actions a visitor takes, starting from the moment they check your website at home to the moment they safely exit your building. It includes:

- **Phase 1:** Planning and pre-visit information (your website).
- **Phase 2:** Arrival and entry (transport and parking).
- **Phase 3:** The visit (moving through the galleries, understanding the displays, and accessing facilities such as restrooms and café).

You must remember that accessibility is a continuous sequence. If one link – such as an inaccessible ticket form on your website – is broken, the entire visit fails, even if your building is perfectly accessible once they arrive.



Figure 2. Couple visiting a museum (Source: Guilherme Christmann, via Pexels.com, ID: 3939634, accessed 18th February, 2026).

Alt text: Senior couple standing side by side in a museum, viewed from behind, quietly admiring a painting on display.

Human-Centred Design and Co-Creation

To ensure your chain has no broken links, you should use Human-Centred Design (HCD). This is an iterative process that keeps people at the heart of your decision-making. The best way for you to understand the needs of Persons with Sensory Disabilities (PwSD) is to involve them as co-creators. Following the philosophy of "Nothing About Us Without Us", you should invite community members with disabilities to test your digital tools and physical spaces before they are finalised. Their lived experience will provide

the deep insights you need to move beyond simple compliance towards true inclusion.

The Rights-Based Approach: Moving from Access to Belonging

To transform your institution, you must lead a shift in how you view your visitors. Moving from "Access" to "Belonging" requires you to adopt a Rights-Based Approach. This framework, which is a core part of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), asserts that persons with disabilities have a fundamental right to participate in cultural life on an equal basis with everyone else.

In the past, many institutions followed a "Medical" or "Charity" model, viewing disabled people as patients to be "fixed" or as victims who needed help. This old way of thinking often led to segregation and made people feel like a burden. Instead, you should follow the Social Model of Disability, which recognises that people are "disabled" by the barriers created by society rather than by their own impairments. Under this model, the responsibility for change is on you – the institution – to identify and remove those barriers.

From Access to Belonging

It is helpful for you to distinguish between technical access and true belonging. "Access" is often the technical ability to enter a room, such as having a ramp next to the stairs. "Belonging" is the powerful feeling that the room was designed with you in mind from the start. When you apply Universal Design (UD), you create a space where everyone feels welcome without needing to ask for special treatment.

Identifying Institutional Barriers

You cannot achieve belonging without looking at your Institutional Barriers. These are the laws, policies, and practices that result in discrimination, even if you do not intend them to.

- ▶ **Budgeting as a Commitment:** You should ask yourself: does your annual budget reflect a commitment to rights, or is accessibility treated as an "extra" only if funds remain at the end of the year?
- ▶ **Inclusive Procurement:** When you hire outside teams to build your website or design your exhibitions, you must require them to meet EU accessibility standards.
- ▶ **Safe Spaces:** Does your institution have a clear "Safer Space" policy? This is a formal commitment to being a discrimination-free zone, providing clear steps for how to handle inappropriate behaviour or exclusion if it happens on your premises.

By evaluating these three areas, you move from just providing "access" to creating an institution where everyone truly belongs.



Figure 3. Non-discriminatory hiring (Source: MART-PRODUCTION, via Alamy, ID: 405123574, accessed 18th February, 2026).

Alt text: Three cafeteria staff members posing together: a man and woman in wheelchairs, and a man with Down syndrome standing between them, all smiling.

Understanding Barriers for Persons with Sensory Disabilities (PwSD)

For visitors with sensory disabilities, barriers are often invisible hurdles that affect how they perceive and process information.

1. Communication Barriers: The Single-Channel Trap

A major barrier occurs when you rely on a single sensory channel to share information. For example, a video with no captions or sign language is a wall for D/deaf visitors. Similarly, an exhibition with only visual labels is a wall for blind or visually impaired visitors. To be inclusive, you should provide redundant channels, such as text and audio and tactile elements, so that if one channel fails, the visitor can still understand the content.

2. Sensory Overload: The Need for Predictability

Many visitors, including neurodivergent people, can experience sensory overload. Loud background noises, flickering lights, or strong smells can make a museum visit distressing. You can remove this barrier by providing "Sensory Maps" that highlight "hot spots" of high stimulation and identify quiet spaces where visitors can recharge.

3. Digital Barriers: The Virtual Wall

Your website is often the very first link in the Accessibility Chain. If your website cannot be navigated by keyboard alone, you are excluding people who cannot use a mouse. Furthermore, the European Accessibility Act (EAA) mandates that by June 2025, digital services like yours must be functional for everyone. This



Figure 4. Illustration of an accessible museum with multiple features designed to support visitors with diverse access needs (Source: AI-generated image, created by SenseAble Culture project for illustrative purposes, 2026). **Alt text:** A museum interior showing paintings, sculptures, interactive exhibits, and visitors using different accessibility features. A person wears headphones, another sits in a quiet room, others view artworks and use touchscreens. A central accessibility icon is linked by arrows to different areas, highlighting accessible navigation throughout the museum.

includes adding Alt-text to images and ensuring your online ticket forms are simple and error-free.

Deep Dive: The Accessibility Pre-Planning Checklist (The "How")

Your Starting Point: The SenseAble Culture Checklist

To move beyond a general desire for inclusion, you need a structured way to measure where you stand today. The **Accessibility Pre-Planning Checklist** is a digital self-assessment tool customised for the SenseAble Culture project. It is built upon established international frameworks, such as:

- **The NEMO: Museums of Impact (MOI) and Diversity Checklists**
- **The 1/2022 Culture for All Service Accessibility and Diversity Checklist** for Museums

The **Accessibility Pre-Planning Checklist** specifically focuses on the needs of Persons with Sensory Disabilities (PwSD).

By using this tool, you can move away from guesswork and begin a formal planning process that identifies exactly where your institution is succeeding and where it is creating barriers. The checklist categorises your operations into six key areas:

- 1. Physical Barriers:** Checking if your building is easy to arrive at, enter, and move through safely.
- 2. Institutional Barriers:** Evaluating if accessibility is part of your official strategies, budget, and hiring policies.
- 3. Communication Barriers:** Assessing if your information is provided through multiple senses (like audio and text) and uses Plain Language.
- 4. Attitudinal Barriers:** Measuring how well your staff is trained to welcome and support visitors with sensory needs.
- 5. Digital Barriers:** Verifying if your website follows WCAG standards so it is usable by everyone.
- 6. Consultation and Feedback:** Checking how deeply you involve the disabled community in your decision-making.

The Scoring Logic as Your Roadmap

The Accessibility Pre-Planning Checklist uses a scale of 1 to 5. You should not view these numbers as just a grade; instead, they serve as a developmental guide to help you prioritise your next steps. When you score an item, your decision must be based on concrete evidence from your daily operations.

You can use the following logic to understand your journey:

- ▶ **Level 1 (Extremely Poorly):** There is no proof that this matter exists or has even been discussed. Your Goal: Awareness.

- ▶ **Level 2 (Below Average):** You are discussing the matter, but there are no physical changes or evidence yet. Your Goal: Planning.
- ▶ **Level 3 (Satisfactory):** You have implemented the matter, but you haven't evaluated how well it works or developed it further. Your Goal: Formalisation.
- ▶ **Level 4 (Well):** The matter works well in practice and you regularly evaluate it. Your Goal: Consistency.
- ▶ **Level 5 (Extremely Well):** This is a particular strength of your institution; it is innovative and part of a continuous cycle of development. Your Goal: Leadership.

Note: You should avoid using Level 3 as a "middle-ground" compromise. If you are unsure, look strictly at the evidence of your institution's performance.

The Feedback Loop: "Nothing About Us Without Us"

A central part of the **Accessibility Pre-Planning Checklist** is the principle of **Engagement**. You must move from assuming what a visitor with vision or hearing loss needs to actually **asking them**. True evaluation is a loop that includes:

- ▶ **Co-creation:** Involving Persons with Sensory Disabilities in the very early planning stages of a new exhibition or digital tool.
- ▶ **User Testing:** Inviting visitors with disabilities to test your audio guides or website before you finalise them.
- ▶ **Feedback Channels:** Offering many accessible ways for visitors to complain or give suggestions, such as through web forms, email, or phone.



Figure 5. Visitors engaging with exhibition content in a museum gallery, co-creation process (Source: Freepik, via magnific.com, Exibicionismo, accessed 18th February, 2026).

Alt text: A diverse Exploration Group of people with and without disabilities collaborating in a museum workshop to test Accessibility.

The Rationale for Continuous Feedback: The Accessibility Chain

You must view accessibility as a **chain of events**. Human-Centred Design (HCD) is an iterative process that keeps the visitor at the heart of your evaluation. Because the visitor experience starts at home and ends when they leave your facility, any **broken link** makes the entire visit a failure.

For example, if your website has a digital barrier (like an inaccessible ticket form), the visitor may never reach your physically accessible building. Continuous evaluation allows you to strengthen every touchpoint. By incorporating **redundant sensory channels** – such as providing information through text, audio, and

tactile models – you ensure that if one link or sensory channel fails, the visitor can still perceive your content and enjoy their visit.

Implementation Strategies, Solutions and Action Plans

Turning Scores into Strategy: Creating Your Multi-Year Plan

Once you have completed the **Accessibility Pre-Planning Checklist** and received your scores, you must translate these results into a formal **Accessibility Action Plan**. Your scores are not a final grade but a **developmental roadmap** that tells you where to focus your energy and resources first.

If your majority score was **1 or 2**, your institution is in the **Awareness and Planning** phase. In this stage, you should prioritise "**Priority 1**" barriers, which are the essential changes needed to get people through your front door, such as accessible parking, step-free entrances, and clear signage. If your majority score was **4 or 5**, you have reached the **Active Development or Leading Inclusivity** phase. Your next steps should focus on **advanced co-creation**, where Persons with Sensory Disabilities act as active partners in your research and design processes rather than just test subjects.

Putting It Into Practice: Actionable Recommendations

To move directly into an effective planning process, you should follow these core strategies derived from the project's methodology:

Core Strategy Checklist

- ▶ **Conduct a Baseline Audit:** Use the Accessibility Pre-Planning Checklist at least once a year to identify physical, digital, and attitudinal obstacles that have not yet been addressed.
- ▶ **Secure Budgetary Commitment:** Move accessibility costs from a "one-off" project expense to a dedicated annual budget line for services like audio description and sign language.
- ▶ **Implement Systematic Training:** Ensure all staff – including security, reception, and management – receive mandatory training on disability etiquette and sensory disability communication.
- ▶ **Establish Permanent Feedback Channels:** Form a stable advisory group of disabled stakeholders who meet regularly to evaluate your exhibitions and digital supply before they are finalised.
- ▶ **Enforce Inclusive Procurement:** Update your institution's policies to require that all external contractors, such as web designers, provide proof that their products meet EU accessibility standards.

Examples

Depending on your institutional setting, these strategies can be applied in different creative ways:

In a Library or Theatre: The "Sensory Walk" You invite a local person with vision loss or a neurodivergent community member to walk through your space and narrate their feelings of safety and welcome. During this walk, you might discover that while your entrance is ramped, the **glare** from high-gloss floors or bright fluorescent lights makes navigation impossible for someone with low vision. **Action:** You install non-reflective floor runners or adjustable, glare-free lighting to solve the problem.



Figure 6. Woman reading a book in a library (Source: Pixabay, via Pexels, ID: 256455, accessed 18th February, 2026).

Alt text: A woman viewed from behind stands reading a book in a library, surrounded by floor-to-ceiling bookshelves filled with colourful volumes.

Summary

By following this chapter, you have learned how to turn evaluation into a powerful tool for inclusion. Here are the most critical points for you to remember:

Use the Checklist as your Roadmap: The **Accessibility Pre-Planning Checklist** is your starting point to identify specific barriers in six areas: physical, institutional, communication, attitudinal, digital, consultation and feedback.

Prioritise Action through Scoring: Use the 1–5 scale to move from mere awareness to leadership. If you score low, focus first on **"Priority 1" barriers** to ensure everyone can at least get through your front door.

Incorporate Multi-sensory Redundancy: You must ensure that essential information is provided through more than one sensory channel (e.g., text and audio) to be truly accessible.

Nothing About Us Without Us: You should never guess what a visitor needs. Real improvement happens when you involve **Persons with Sensory Disabilities (PwSD)** as co-creators in your evaluation process.

Glossary

Accessibility Chain

The continuous sequence of actions a visitor takes, from the pre-visit website search to safely exiting the building.

Audio Description (AD)

A service that provides a verbal narration of visual elements for visitors with vision loss.

Plain Language

A clear way of writing (CEFR Level B2) that avoids technical jargon so information is easy for everyone to understand.

Developmental Roadmap

A step-by-step plan that shows how an organisation, project, or initiative will progress from its current state to its desired future state. It identifies key goals, milestones, actions, and timelines for implementation.

Feedback

Information, opinions, and observations provided by visitors, staff, and other participants regarding the museum experience. It helps the institution identify barriers, understand the public's actual needs, and continuously improve accessibility, services, and the content it offers.

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