

# ACCESSIBLE WORK METHODS



The following suggestions are not exhaustive but starting points. They come directly from a range of disabled artists who contributed to this guide.

## Do



- Check your intention: why do you want to work with a disabled artist? Is it only about visual representation/performance inclusivity/"optics"? Treat each artist with respect, and do not employ people as a tokenistic gesture.
- Engage an Accessibility Consultant or contact Access Arts Australia to help throughout the casting process.
- Check the accessibility of the theatres, studios or venues you will be performing at during the production.
- Ask what access support you can offer throughout the working period: in an audition call-out, during an audition, in the contracting stage, during the rehearsal process and during performances.
- Approach each artist as the expert of their own body and needs. Give them an opportunity to show themselves at their best and be curious to find out what they can offer as unique individuals.
- Use open language: e.g., speak about movement qualities, ideas, images, not only body-part specific.
- Open your choreography: create movement tasks which give space for the performer's interpretation and movement, vocabulary rather than copying and executing given movement. If using set material, offer options and be open to each artist's translation, for example, the material could be done at different speeds, levels, etc.
- Encourage artists to do what they need to retain movement material: draw, make notes, take video, make voice recordings.
- Be aware of the difference between being curious and exploring an artist's capabilities and being fascinated by their impairment or use of adaptive technology. For example, you are working with an artist who uses a wheelchair, not a wheel-chair.
- Focus on the person.
- Talk to artists. Performers want to be challenged, within their capabilities. Don't be afraid to ask for more, give specific notes on what you're looking for, and listen when artists say they are at their maximum capacity. Be as rigorous as you would be with a non-disabled performer, while respecting their needs.

## Don't



- Ask about a disabled artist's medical history (unless they disclose it to you in order to work safely). Don't ask performers to explain the history of their impairment to you or to anyone on the team. Many disabled artists experience invasive questions, medicalisation, and fascination with their impairment through their daily life. Be a powerful ally!
- You should not ask questions about any matter related to a protected characteristic (age, pregnancy, sexual orientation etc.) at audition stage. Any question related to a protected characteristic post-casting must be wholly relevant and you should provide information on why that question is being asked.
- Use outdated or offensive language.

## Remember:

when you've met one disabled artist, you've met... one disabled artist!

Different artists with the same impairment will all have different ways of moving, experiences, skill sets, personalities, and will each offer you something unique.

## Tip:

simple communication such as, "You can adapt the material to suit your own body/pace of learning" opens possibilities and helps level the playing field.

# BEFORE THE AUDITION



## Level up

- Employ the services of an accessibility consultant or Access Arts Australia for the casting process and during the production.
- Strive for representative voices throughout your organisation at every level: audition panel, board members, employees, freelance creative team, etc.
- Are there Deaf, disabled, neurodiverse, LGBTQI+, and a range of ethnic backgrounds represented in your organisation at all levels?



## Create your access budget

The Federal Government's Employment Assistance Fund (EAF) exists to cover the costs of support for a worker who is Deaf or disabled to find work and stay in work, which includes workplace modifications, equipment and assistive technology.

- Actively encourage applications from artists who identify as Deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent. Be clear with the role you are casting for. Is your project related to working with performers with a specific impairment? Or is this role open to the range of people who identify as disabled?
- Think about your project. Could a disabled artist join your project, even if you didn't imagine this initially? What qualities are you actually looking for? Describe the role in terms of movement qualities, dance style, characteristics of a performer you are looking for (e.g. fluidity, musicality, lightness, athleticism, strong presence). Specifying physical attributes dissuades many disabled artists from applying.
- Include key dates in your call out: when will performers be notified they have been invited to audition? When and how will you communicate if they've got the job?
- Make your call out available in different accessible formats: Video with Auslan (Australian Sign Language) and captioning, audio description, large print, easy read.
- Ensure your marketing is accessible.
- Offer a variety or combination of options for applicants to send you their information: CV, written material, video, voice recording.
- Keep language simple and clear, keep the materials you ask for streamlined.
- Leave plenty of lead-up time for applications. Short notice can be a disabling barrier.
- Where possible, offer reading material in various fonts, font sizing and colours for those with visual impairment or/and learning disabilities.



# Experience

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- Be aware that many disabled artists enter the profession through non-traditional routes. Many artists have faced barriers and been denied access to studying performing arts in many settings, including higher education institutions, and have therefore developed their own bespoke movement techniques and learned on the job. How can you articulate what sort of experience and qualities you are looking for, besides completion of a performing arts degree or the frequent "three years' professional experience"?
- Collect data and analyse it. Who are you employing? A lack of representation of disabled artists within your previous work, your company members, and your promotional materials, can dissuade disabled artists from applying. If you have worked inclusively in the past, how can you share this? If you have not, be transparent about this fact and that you are learning as you enter new territory.
- If you are auditioning large numbers of people, could early rounds be done digitally? This can be a tool which saves time and energy for many artists and can help level the playing field.
- For many disabled artists, the energy required to continuously apply for different opportunities, to travel to and attend an audition, can be especially draining. Invite people you are really interested in meeting, who have a real chance at getting the job.

## Audition Planning

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The Federal Government's Employment Assistance Fund (EAF) exists to cover the costs of support for a worker who is Deaf or disabled to find work and stay in work, which includes workplace modifications, equipment and assistive technology.

- Have an Accessibility Consultant on the casting panel.
- Actively ask invited artists about their access needs when you invite them to audition. Some artists use a personal access rider, and some don't. You can ask for these or any other access needs you can support. Be prepared to follow through and carry accessible practices all the way to the project's completion.
- Be prepared to provide additional material like videos and recordings of the particular scene or musical number you wish to be performed in the audition.
- Hold the audition in an accessible space.
- Work with the venue to make the environment as accessible and comfortable as possible. Consider, for example, waiting areas, changing areas, studios, accessible toilets and break areas.
- If a warm-up or technique class will be lead, make sure it is accessible. If in doubt, hire a teacher with experience of inclusive teaching practices to lead the warm-up. When inviting artists to audition, send a detailed plan of what to expect from the audition. For example, how long will individuals be asked to move in each session? How long are break times? What kind of creative material will they be asked to explore?
- It is also important to consider practical needs such as access to the venue and facilities available on site, where to find food, water, accessible toilets, parking, public transport and taxi options.
- Be transparent about what access needs you can support and any you are unable to meet. Look for solutions to meet as many needs as possible. For example, if an artist needs a taxi from the nearest station, you could cover the cost.
- Plan the timing of your audition in a supportive way. E.g., allow for enough time for toilet breaks, filling water, and rest. Some disabled artists may need more time for this. Be aware that long days or multi-day auditions can be a barrier for performers with fatigue and chronic pain conditions.

# AT THE AUDITION

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- No last-minute changes to the scene or musical number, if you must, ensure you also see the part they prepared for and include this in the decision making of who gets the role.
- Brief your entire audition team/panel on access support requirements before the performers arrive. Make sure this is taken care of in advance so artists don't need to explain themselves when they arrive and can focus on doing their best performance.
- Lay out the plan of the day clearly and simply. Check if your planning meets everyone's needs.
- Create an open environment and have check-ins throughout the day so people can share their needs. Access needs can change throughout a workday. Performers do not always disclose their needs for fear of being denied a job. It's important that you listen and adjust activities accordingly.

## Engagement

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- As you hire a performer and move towards the rehearsal process, have a more in-depth conversation about access. Ask if an artist uses a personal access rider. This is a document detailing their access support which can be shared with the team as needed.
- Update your project planning according to your team's access needs.
- Hire access workers to support your project, for example Auslan interpreters, mental health support, touring assistants. Remember that the Employment Assistance Fund (EAF) exists to cover some of or all of the costs of providing access to work.
- Hold the audition in an accessible space.



# IN THE REHEARSAL ROOM



- Ensure you have an Accessibility Consultant in the studio.
- Hold rehearsals in an accessible space.
- Remember that access is an ongoing conversation, not a checklist which is finished. People's needs can change through the day and work process and may be different on different days. Make a habit of checking in frequently.
- Lay clear guidelines for respectful and supportive engagement across the team. Do not tolerate any level of bullying or abusive behaviour in the workplace.
- Consider access when designing costumes, set, lighting, the backstage and performance environment. Work collaboratively with the entire team —this can be an exciting opportunity to innovate.
- Keep questions practical, connected to movement and working practice, don't assume what a performer is or is not capable of, e.g. "could you do that movement with more energy?" "Can I put more/less of my weight onto your shoulder at this moment?"
- Be mindful of the artist's role — they are not your representative for the disabled experience.
- Their impairment isn't a source of information or expertise. Allow them to do their role without the added pressure of being a consultant if they are not paid for that as well.

As Graeae\* put it, "Under the Social Model of disability, people are disabled by barriers within society, rather than being 'victims' of their impairments or conditions."

The Social Model considers disability as the result of oppressive and discriminatory barriers of attitude, infrastructure and environment in society. This is in contrast to the Medical Model of Disability which views disability through a medical lens and considers the disabled person as the ("suffering") patient or recipient of treatment.

The Social Model puts the onus on organisers and providers to consider the ways in which structures and ableist systems create barriers that might disable people, and to examine ways in which these barriers can be removed.



## Engagement

Examples of barriers include:

- **Environmental**: lack of ramps, easy-to-read information, or lifts.
- **Attitudes**: prejudices, assumptions, stereotypes, bullying and hate crimes.
- **Organisational**: inflexible practices, policies, or procedures.

