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The Wild Escape

Creating inclusive and accessible experiences toolkit



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This toolkit has been created for The Wild Escape project, to support participating museums to create inclusive and accessible experiences. It has been produced by LEEDS 2023 and Leeds Museums & Galleries in consultation with colleagues and museums across the sector.

It is an introduction to some of the current approaches to access and inclusion being adopted across the sector. However, it is not intended to be a comprehensive guide and links to further information have been provided.

We would like this, like our other toolkits, to bring helpful information together and a starting point for discussion. If you have thoughts or comments, please do contact us! thewildescape@artfund.org

Contributors

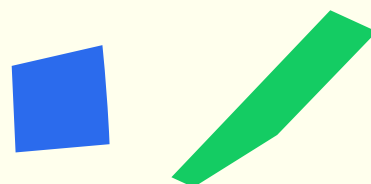
This toolkit has been compiled by Kate Fellows (Head of Learning and Access at Leeds Museums & Galleries) and by Chris Ansell, Carolyn Bradley, Laura Rakotonirina, Hannaa Hamdache, Megan Hydes, Jay Millard, Naomi Momoh and Aidan Riddell (all from LEEDS 2023).

LEEDS 2023 and Leeds Museums & Galleries would like to thank Mark Ellis (Lead, National Memorial Arboretum), Carol King (Director of Programmes, Black Country Living Museum), Samantha Stimpson (Clare Fellow, Founder and Managing Director of SLS 360) and the Yorkshire Accessible Museum Network for sharing their experience, and hope that this toolkit can prompt further conversation into how museums can be inclusive and accessible to all.

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Access and inclusion for all



We all have a responsibility to ensure that museums are welcoming and accessible to all, and to make sure that people do not experience barriers to engaging with museums.

Barriers to engagement can occur when a museum fails to understand and consider the needs and experiences of a wide range of people.

For example, historically, individuals who identify as Black, Brown, Asian, mixed, or ethnically diverse¹ are more likely to experience barriers when engaging with museums than their white counterparts.

'There is a substantial body of literature across the various public policy domains suggesting that black and minority ethnic communities face multiple barriers in accessing public services and provision. Numerous reports have observed that the museum sector concentrates overwhelmingly upon a dominant white culture, and one that has little or no direct relevance to the lives of black and minority ethnic people. In our opinion, those problems are symptomatic of a wider failure of engagement.'

[Cover.qxp \(culturehive.co.uk\)](https://www.cover.qxp/culturehive.co.uk)



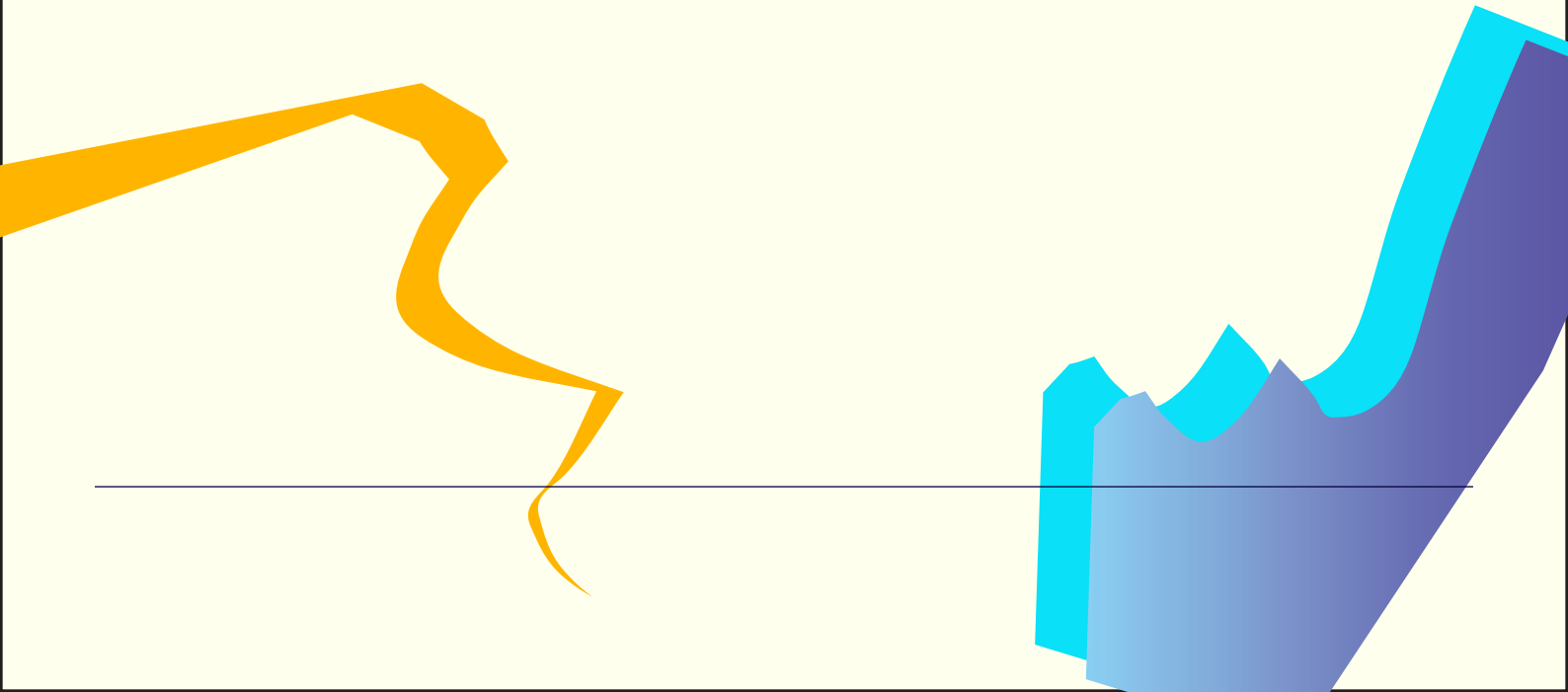
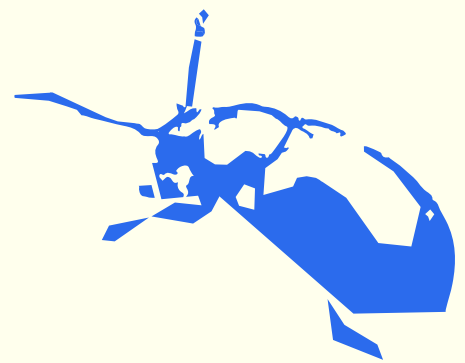
¹Different terminology is used by people, groups, and organisations when referring to certain experiences or protected characteristics, and many prefer to self-define. In this toolkit, we use terminology used by people who identify in such a way, while also acknowledging its historical baggage and limitations.

Disabled people also historically are more likely to face barriers to engagement. The social model of disability, developed by Disabled people, states that:

'People are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference. Barriers can be physical, like buildings not having accessible toilets. Or they can be caused by people's attitudes to difference, like assuming disabled people can't do certain things. People are disadvantaged by barriers in society rather than an impairment or 'difference' they experience.'

[Social model of disability](#) | [Disability charity Scope UK](#)

Everyone is different and people experience various circumstances and have a range of needs. By considering a wide range of circumstances, experiences and needs – possibly with the help of an advisory group – we can ensure that barriers are not a limiting factor and that all can experience and enjoy museums. In addition to helping us to meet our social responsibility, ensuring that museums are inclusive and accessible can help grow diverse audiences who see museums as a place for them.



Advisory groups

To help make museums accessible and inclusive, we need to work with a diverse range of people to understand their experience and any barriers they may anticipate. This is often referred to as people's 'lived and felt experience'.

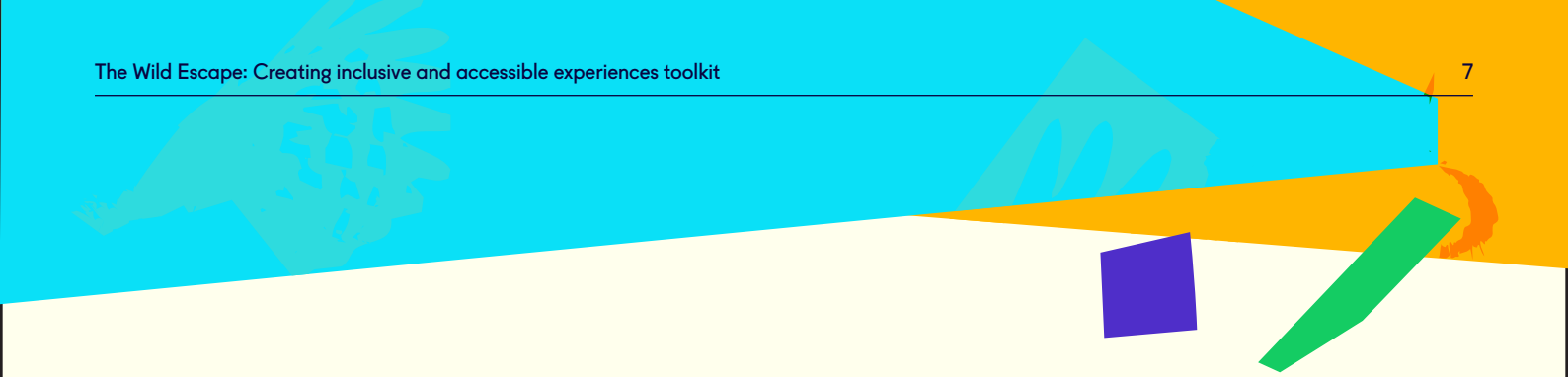
Many museums and cultural organisations have invited people to put themselves forward to participate in an advisory group. Advisory groups, whether one off or run over a period, can help to understand people's experience or understanding of a museum, to identify any barriers, and work through approaches to ensuring access and inclusion. It's important to note, though, that people participating in advisory groups are only able to speak from their own lived and felt experience, and it should not be assumed they speak on behalf of an entire community.

If you are just starting out on your access and inclusion journey, SEND in Museums has helpful hints on getting started working with different groups: sendinmuseums.org/how-to-work-with-send/developing-your-send-offer/. Start small for the Wild Escape and work with a group to co-develop an activity, resource or small-scale event.

LEEDS 2023

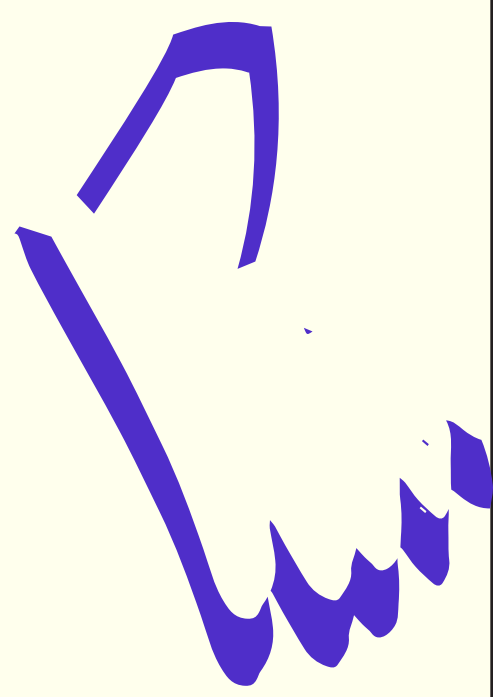
'When designing LEEDS 2023 Year of Culture programme, we invited young people to participate in a youth voice group. Our 'Young Leaders' took part in weekly workshops, convened a Youth Summit, developed a youth voice manifesto, and have informed our approach to working with young people across the year. To ensure a diverse range of young people took part as Young Leaders and attended the summit, we promoted the opportunities through a range of channels and removed barriers to participation by doing things such as paying participants a stipend and having BSL interpretation at the event.'

Laura Rakotonirina,
Youth Development Manager,
LEEDS 2023



If you are developing your access and inclusion work, an advisory panel may be able to help you complete an access audit of your venue to see what you do well, and what you need to plan to develop for the future. Visit England Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme (VAQAS) have a disability access audit tool on their website (sign in required) and lots of links to case studies: www.visitengland.com/travel-info-and-advice/accessible-england

If you have an established co-creation framework for access and inclusion practice, think about the make-up of your advisory panel. Does the group need refreshing? Whose voices aren't you hearing? How could you work with more or different people? How do they influence, change and lead the organisational direction and strategies? Are key decision makers and those in formal positions of power involved?



Visitor experience

All audiences and visitors should have the opportunity to have a positive learning experience with museums. By considering the barriers that people can face before and throughout their visit and working to remove them, we can help create an accessible and inclusive visitor experience.

Before people visit your museum

A person's experience of your museum begins before they walk through the door, as many will have visited your website or seen marketing activity. Consider the following checklist:

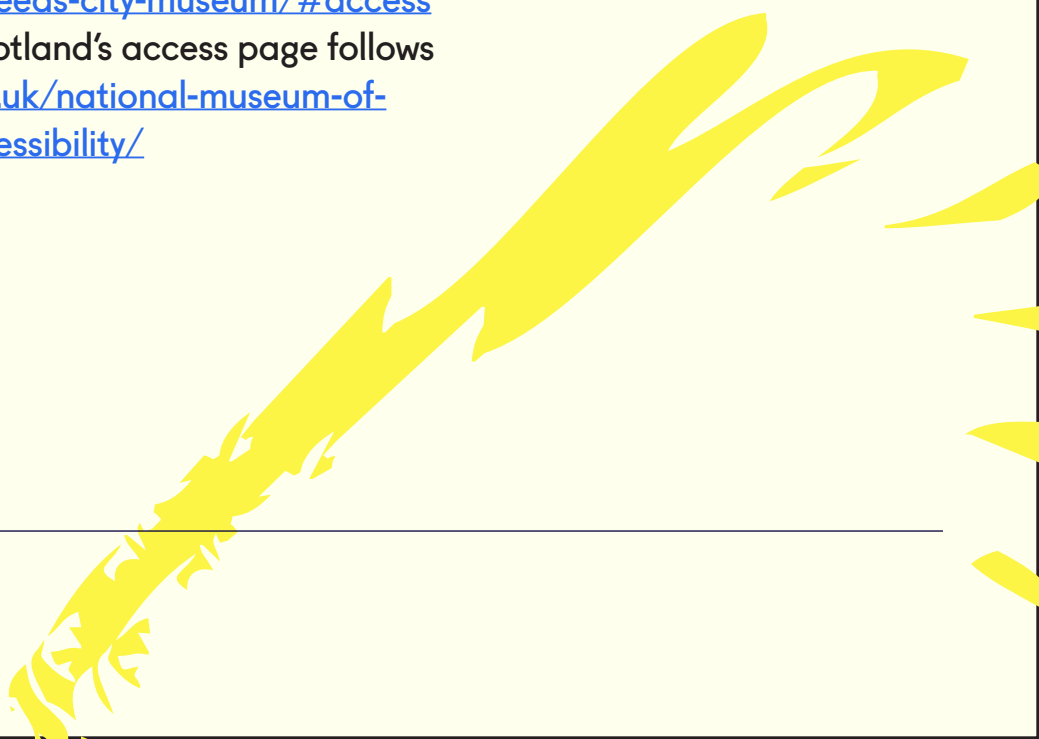
- Do your website images feature people from a diverse range of different backgrounds and identities?
- How and where do they appear? What are they doing? Be aware of stereotypes!
- What information is there regarding your commitment to being more inclusive and representative?
- Do you have an anti-racist policy or document showing your commitment to being more equitable, diverse and inclusive?
- What access needs do you currently meet? Who is excluded? Consider the needs of people with physical disabilities and those who are neuro-diverse.

Websites have their own access regulations. Museum DCN has a good starting point guide on this: www.musedcn.org.uk/2020/05/11/digital-inclusion-standards/

Many people decide if they want to visit your museum by looking for your access information on your website. If it's not easy to find, or doesn't have the answers they want, they won't visit. So, a warm welcome starts with any pre-visit information available on your website, social media, or through a third-party online presence.

If you are just starting out in access work, ask an individual, group or your advisory panel to find and review the access information on your website. Does it make sense? Is it easy to find? Do they see themselves represented? Does it contain the information they would want to see? When looking at the website, be clear about what support you can offer, regularly check the information is accurate, and give a contact phone number / email for if they have further questions. SEND in Museums has a really good top tips list for websites: sendinmuseums.org/how-to-work-with-send/getting-started/website/

If you are further developing your access work, VocalEyes assess the heritage sector annually and have guidance for web access information: vocaleyes.co.uk/research/heritage-access-2022/ adapt the information to suit your needs. Leeds City Museum has adapted the VocalEyes guidance to suit the venue: museumsandgalleries.leeds.gov.uk/leeds-city-museum/visit-leeds-city-museum/#access and National Museum of Scotland's access page follows a similar format www.nms.ac.uk/national-museum-of-scotland/plan-your-visit/accessibility/



Visual stories are a good way to illustrate what a visitor can expect during their visit. They are usually a word document (easily read by screen readers) with a series of photographs stacked on top of each other in a column on one side of the page, and simple 'easy read' sentences explaining what is going to happen on the other. All of these museums worked with individuals and groups to develop visual stories.

If you need a document converted to an accessible format, including braille, large and giant print, audio, EasyRead, or as a hybrid disc containing a number of formats the RNIB has a [transcription service](#) that you may use. The UK Association for Accessible Formats has also produced a [guide to producing clear and large format](#) documents.

- Leeds City Museum word document version: museumsandgalleries.leeds.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Leeds-City-Museum-Visual-Story-.pdf
- The Science Museum's webpage version: www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/science-museum-visual-story
- Tolson Museums webpage version: www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/museums-and-galleries/tolson-museum/visual-story.aspx
- Scarborough Museum had funding to complete a visual story animation for reopening after Covid: youtu.be/CjP2L3aIwhU
- Barnsley Museums have audio versions of the documents: www.barnsley-museums.com/accessibility/visual-stories
- Eureka have filmed versions: youtu.be/D7BoRvxk-dU



Arrival and welcome

A friendly and informative welcome can help all feel at ease in a museum. Highlighting the variety of options available to visitors throughout their visit, including things such as sensory bags and family trails, accessible routes, toilet facilities, and catering offers, can help people make the most of their visit and ensure they know that their needs are being considered.

Training for staff and volunteers

Providing staff and volunteers access and inclusion training can equip them to deliver the best visitor experience.

If you are starting out on your access and inclusion journey, think about what skills and knowledge your team has already and use that experience to cascade training to other members of the team. A skills audit may help you identify strengths and help plan to fill any gaps. If your Wild Escape event or programme involves working with a specific group, tailor and 'hang' your training around planning for the event.

If you are developing your access and inclusion practice, think about more formal, organisation support, ideally with skills, knowledge and lived experience of the groups you want to increase engagement with, who can support you with key issues for your museum. This support should be specific to your museum and may include:

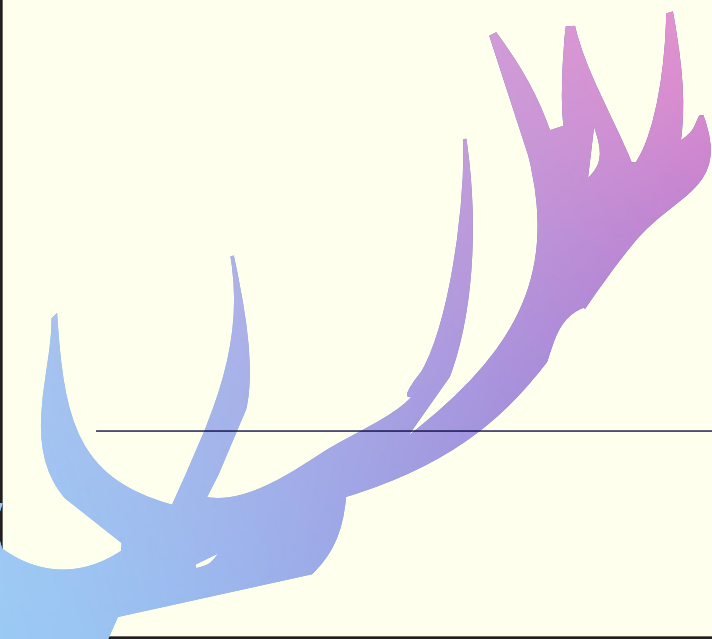
- Learning about different visible and hidden needs and disabilities (such as mobility, sensory, neurological, learning, mental health, childcare and financial needs) and how best to welcome and create participation opportunities for these bodies and minds.



- Workshops and training in Anti-racism, Bias Awareness and Inclusive Practice in Action, to enable people to think critically about their own behaviour, learned prejudices and how it relates to their role.
- How different needs link to your safeguarding, ED&I and evacuation policies and procedures.

Train everyone to use some simple Makaton signs (hello, goodbye, thank you, help, shop, café, toilets etc). Makaton is a communication tool that uses your hands to make signs whilst saying the words out loud. It is used internationally and particularly by people who are non-verbal or have learning disabilities but is also increasingly used to support the development of communication and language skills of children in a range of educational settings. It is similar (although not related) to British Sign Language (BSL).

Sighted guide training can give staff and volunteers the confidence, skill and empathy to guide a person with sight loss around your museum. The Guide Dogs website has videos introducing some of the basic guiding techniques: www.guidedogs.org.uk/how-you-can-help/sighted-guide-training/



Visitor routes through galleries, buildings and spaces

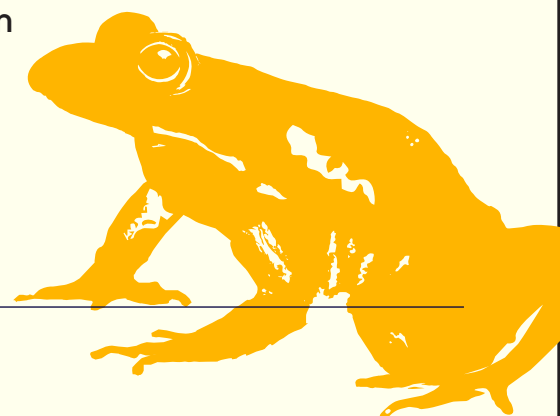
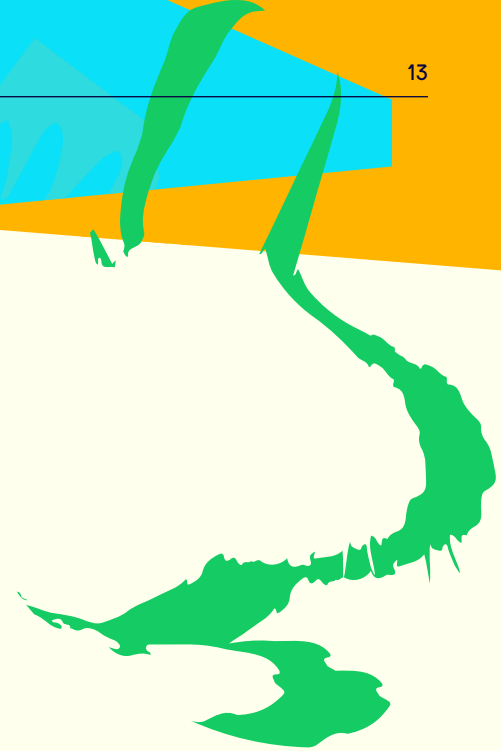
As a person journeys through a museum, there are many things that could be a barrier to their experience and enjoyment.

If you are starting out on your access journey, explore the visitor route with a colleague or critical friend with lived or felt experience of being marginalised and consider different types of access. Invite them to share their experience. How do they navigate the space? What do they observe? How does the space make them feel? Note down easy adaptations you could make. This will form the basis of a simple access audit. (You may also wish to refer to the sections on 'Inclusive narratives' and 'Accessible interpretation' below.)

For a more complex access audit (or, if you have budget) you may choose to employ a consultant with lived experience. The team at Black Country Living Museum regularly complete access audits and review visitor spaces as things often get moved around and need repositioning to ensure access.

You can also complete an access audit when delivery activities in venues outside of the museum, to identify and remove any potential barriers.

Physical barriers, such as stairs and narrow walkways, may present a barrier to wheelchair users. Creating routes that are suitable for wheelchairs, and ensuring these are clear on wayfinding signage, can help users to experience a museum more positively.



Have regular seating and places to rest around galleries. Think about having arm rests to help people rise from the chair and transfer spots for those wishing to move out of their wheelchair. If permanent seating isn't an option, think about whether temporary or moveable seating would work. This also provides wellbeing respite as pause and reflection spaces.

If you are developing your access practice, sensory maps help people know what to expect in a space and help people access museum galleries. They detail what you will hear, see, smell, feel and taste in different gallery spaces. You may find that you need to reduce (or increase) sensory stimulation in different areas. Working with people with lived experience is a good way to develop sensory maps.

- Leeds City Museum is structured on an adapted floor plan map using words: museumsandgalleries.leeds.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Sensory-Map-of-Leeds-City-Museum.pdf
- National Museum of Scotland uses a key and symbols: sensory-map-for-national-museum-of-scotland.pdf (nms.ac.uk)
- Royal Museums Greenwich uses symbols and signs: www.rmg.co.uk/sites/default/files/NMM_SensoryMap_Level_1.pdf

If you have an established access practice, develop all new spaces and exhibitions in co-creation with audiences and considering access needs. Conduct and publish access audits for all new exhibitions.



Toilets and facilities

We all love a toilet, and many conversations in visitor attraction management are about loos. If you are starting out on your access journey, have an accessible toilet. For good examples and ideas look up @MuseumToilets on Twitter.

If you are developing your access practice, consider providing a Changing Places Toilet which have hoists, adult sized changing tables and equipment for people with mobility needs. Development of a Changing Places Toilet requires a substantial budget; however, there is often funding available. To ensure visitors can make best use of your Changing Places Toilet, ensure front of house and housekeeping team members receive training on its use and maintenance. Changing Places maintains an up-to-date map of available facilities, and organisations which provide them are hugely valued by users. For more information on getting started, try SEND in Museums: sendinmuseums.org/how-to-work-with-send/museum-facilities/changing-places-toilets/ or www.changing-places.org/

Providing gender neutral toilets can help people who identify as a range of genders have a positive experience. Consider whether it is possible for some of your toilets to be gender neutral while retaining some gendered toilets for those who would prefer them.

Caregivers with babies and young children require a space where they can privately and hygienically change their infant. Ensure baby changing facilities are in gender neutral toilets or in all facilities for parents of any gender to access. Parents should be made to feel comfortable to breastfeed wherever they choose to do so.

Food offers

People remember toilets and cafes when they visit tourist attractions. Some museums outsource their catering offer, others deliver cafes in house, and some may have a tea urn in the corner. Whatever your offer, you can be welcoming to all and still remain commercial. Consider what you sell and how you sell it. People's religious and ethical beliefs, needs, and allergies, all influence what someone eats and drinks.

You may want to think about how some people living with neurodiversity and disability like or dislike different textures of food. Have a microwave accessible for people warming food and the ability to blend food if required.

Consider ease of movement around your eating area to ensure that tables are easily accessible for all and make sure it is simple to move and rearrange seats to accommodate wheelchair users.

It is a good idea to make highchairs available for carers of babies and very young children and these should be kept clean and available at all times.

National Memorial Arboretum

'As the nation's year-round place to remember, we're committed to ensuring an inclusive experience for all. Our Restaurant and Coffee Shop can be a key moment in a visit, giving people the opportunity to come together or reflect on their experience of the 150-acre Arboretum.

Every day we have a least one vegan option on our menu, ensuring people of all religious beliefs can enjoy lunch, and we always have a range of gluten and lactose-free products available to cater for dietary requirements. Our staff are trained to understand allergens and can help visitors make an informed choice from our menus.

To help support those who may be financially disadvantaged, and whatever their dietary requirements, we ensure a vegan and gluten free soup is always available to enable us to offer a hot, nourishing food option for less than £5.'

Mark Ellis, Lead, National Memorial Arboretum

Buggy and wheelchair parking

A barrier that parents or carers of young children face when trying to access museums and galleries is the lack of space to leave a pram or buggy during their visit, so including a designated space to safely store these can significantly improve accessibility. This is especially important if prams and buggies cannot access your space or are not permitted within it. Increasingly, museums and galleries are now providing slings or baby carriers which visitors can borrow to carry their baby around the space if a pram is not permitted.

The space could also be utilised by wheelchair users who have travelled to the museum in their chair, but may not use it throughout their whole visit.

Relaxed viewing and chill out rooms

For many reasons, people may prefer to visit a museum in a more relaxed set of conditions or benefit from a room in which they can take a moment away from other visitors. For example, people who are neurodivergent may benefit from a quiet space and people living with energy related conditions may require somewhere to rest.

Consider offering relaxed opening times when visitors can experience a building, gallery, exhibit or collection in a different environment. Some visitors, such as those who are neurodivergent, may prefer a quieter environment with raised light levels. Other visitors, such as families, may feel more comfortable in an environment where they can be lively and make noise. Choose a time of the year/week/day when you can predict the space will not be as busy, and offer a variety of visiting environments.



- Kids in Museums with Autism in Museums have a handy hints guide to get started: kidsinmuseums.org.uk/resources/how-can-your-museum-better-welcome-families-and-young-people-with-autism/
- Leeds Museums and Galleries, YSP and Barnsley Museums all support relaxed sessions for families and adults. They are usually listed on events websites – give it a quick Google to see who is doing them near you.
- The National Memorial Arboretum runs reduced sensory sessions during its annual Illuminated Arboretum light trail. This features a twilight start time, reduced capacity, lower volume music, and no rapid-flashing lights.

A chill out room, equipped with sensory objects and rest facilities, can provide a place for people to rest and take time out from their visit.

Prayer rooms

Consider spaces that could be used temporarily or permanently to pray or to practice religious activity.

- The Natural History Museum have a Contemplation Room: www.nhm.ac.uk/visit/access-at-south-kensington.html
- Manchester Museum have a multi-faith space.

Inclusive content and activities

Inclusive narratives

Museums are not neutral. We can never truly decolonise and de-ablise our past (including our natural science collections), but we can tell whole stories and work with people to shape collections and interpretation to tell the stories of Britain today and make a more inclusive future. The content and narratives featured in resources, exhibitions and interpretation should acknowledge our past, tell everyone's story, and be inclusive and representative of a diverse range of people. Our future is stronger if it is co-curated with communities.

Many museums are developing content in co-curated ways. It needs to fit you and your communities.

If you are at the start of your access journey, you may wish to consider:

- Roger Hart's 'Ladder of Participation' and Phil Tresedar's 'Degrees of Participation' which introduce a range of ways that cultural professionals can collaborate with participants.
- Museums Association decolonising practice toolkit and Museums Change Lives campaign: www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/
- Do some research on Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), and look up Nina Simon's Participatory Museum: www.participatorymuseum.org/

Black Country Living Museum

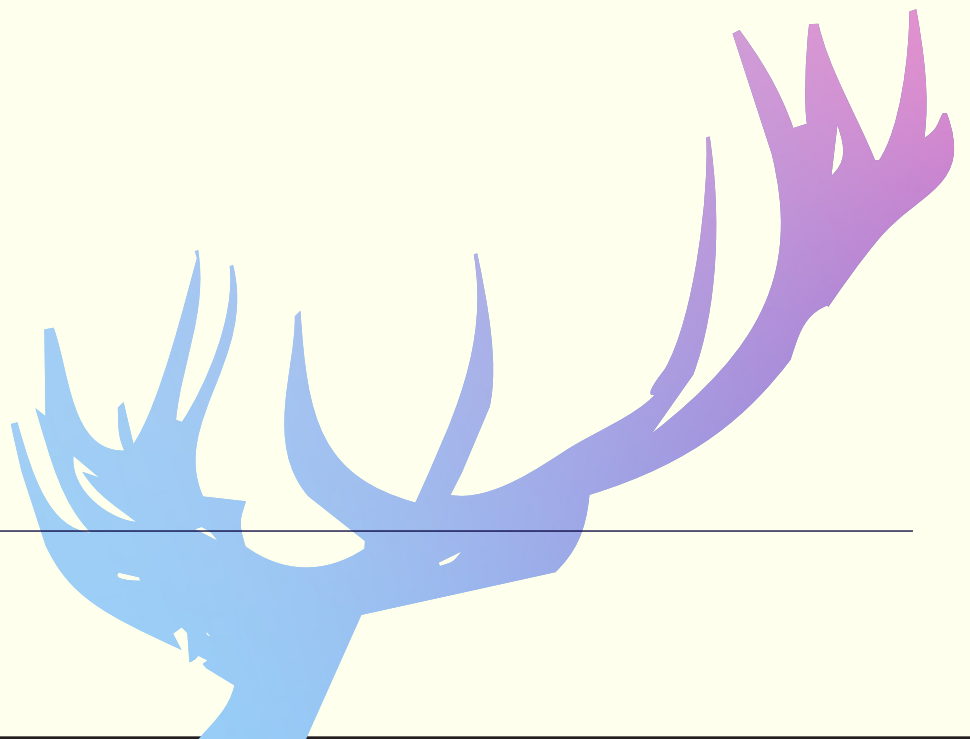
'As a place-based museum, we record and share the story of those who have lived in the Black Country, one of the most ethnically diverse places in the UK.'

In creating interpretation for our new development Forging Ahead, which will see us extend the museum's narrative up to the 1960s, we've engaged with members of the community and consulted with people with a wide range of experiences. This has helped us to understand a range of lived experience and to develop the diverse and authentic narratives in our interpretation in partnership with our communities.'

Carol King, Director of Programmes, Black Country Living Museum

- Thinking about decolonisation through natural science collections on MyLearning.org: mylearning.org/stories/decolonisation-and-natural-science-collections/1339? and NATSCA conference resources: www.natsca.org/natsca-decolonising
- Following @CuratingforChange on Twitter which shares links to guides, best practice and the inclusive exhibitions the fellows are developing.
- Black and Minority Ethnic Engagement with London's Museums: Telling it like it is: Non-user Research (January - April 2004)
[Cover.qxp \(culturehive.co.uk\)](https://cover.qxp.culturehive.co.uk)

If you are either developing your accessible practices or have established methods of co-creation, then you will be listening to and working with your communities to develop content (and organisational strategies) together. Organisations who are also thinking about this include: Leeds Museums and Galleries, Birmingham Museum Trust, Black Country Living Museum, Manchester Museum, and the London Jewish Museum amongst others.



Accessible interpretation

The reason we work in museums is to connect people to objects and their stories. How we make meaningful connections through interpretation is key to what we do. Interpretation is everything that connects us to our audiences. It can be physically accessible (font size and style, word count, height of interpretation panels), intellectually and emotionally inclusive (language and tone of voice used) and sensorily accessible (content in a range of formats such as braille, large print, audio, film with subtitles or BSL, and audio description). It is also worth considering whether it would be beneficial for your visitors for content to be available in other languages.

For the Wild Escape, you probably won't be re-writing text panels or developing exhibitions, but you may be writing resources, activities or information sheets. When you're developing resources, think about:

- People like stories about people. Think about who you are writing for.
- Be concise, use active verbs, and write in plain English.
- Avoid bias and use inclusive language, which is a way of communicating that respects the diversity and dignity of all people and avoids words and phrases that exclude, stereotype, or harm others based on their identity or background.

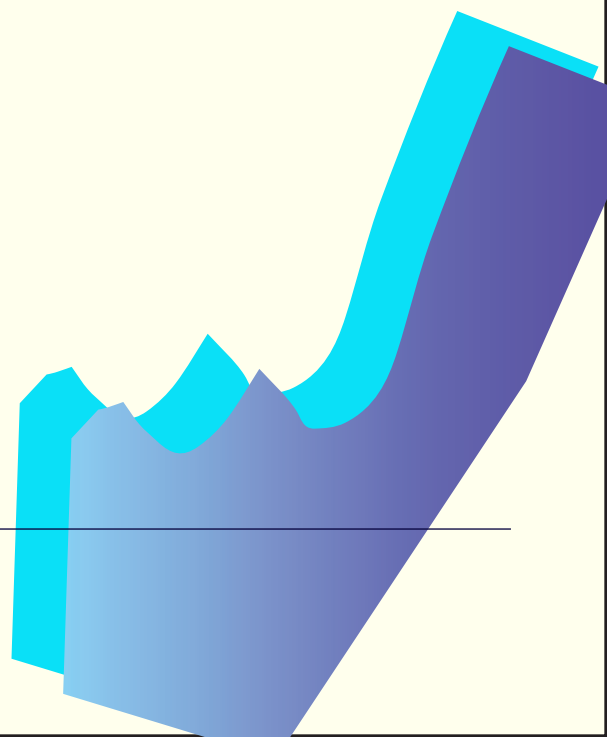
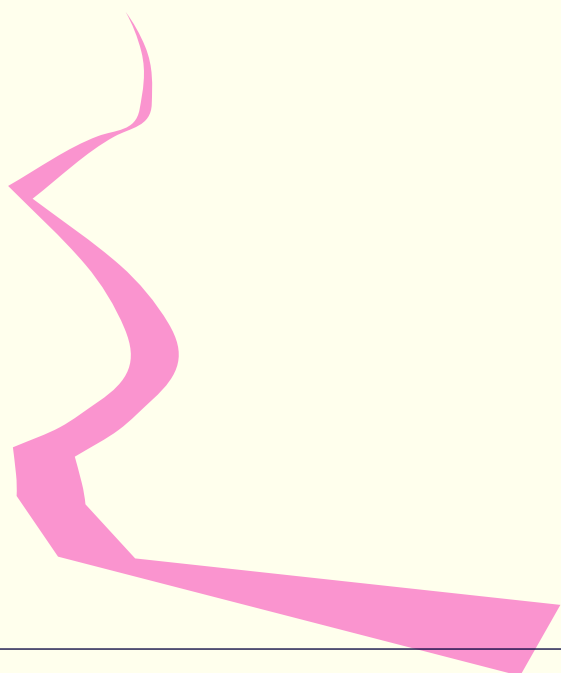
Hull Museums

'We are developing BSL interpretation for our redeveloped medieval gallery in Hull Museum, using BSL interpretation for every text panel. The approach we took was to use local voices (as BSL has regional accents), so we worked with local partners and a local school. Translating technical medieval words within the text with the interpreters was more complicated than first thought, and editing took longer than imagined, but worth it!'

Esther Hallberg, Access and Inclusion Manager, Hull Museums

- Aim at reading age 11 but consider whether it's lower in your area (in Leeds the average reading age is 9). Your local library services should be able to tell you what the reading age is in your area.
- Use a sans serif font in at least 14-point on activity sheets and print with an 80% contrast of text to background. Consider printing on cream, light yellow or blue to help people with dyslexia, or have coloured films to hand.
- Try to avoid laminating as it is difficult to recycle, but if it is necessary then laminate using matt laminating pouches to eliminate shine and reflections for people with visual impairments.
- Build in evaluation into activities to collect data on impact and improve your offer.

Additionally, building in the option to vary the volume of sound pieces can ensure people who are hearing impaired access the content.



Inclusive activities

Activities, whether booked in advanced or ran as a drop-in session, can help bring collections to life and could engage visitors in your Wild Escape project.

When developing activities, talk to a range of people with different needs or target your activity by working with a specific group. Consider including variations and a range of ways in which people can participate, ensuring that people with a wide range of needs and experiences can take part. At Leeds Museums and Galleries, we have found that having a range of art materials available at family activities allows people to have the freedom to choose what they like, and find easy, to use. This involves developing open ended craft activities that can be completed in a variety of ways. Some venues who support regular audiences with visual impairments and neurodiversity have trays set up with crafting materials set up the same way each time.

Depending on the group and the activity, you may need a quieter, or less public, space to work within, or access to a quiet space for participants who may need timeout.

If you have a booked activity, you can ask in advance whether any of the participants experience specific needs or circumstances. This information can help activity facilitators to tailor activities to the needs of participants. However, people should never feel that they have to share their information in order for the activity to be accessible, and a range of options should always be available.

Yorkshire Sculpture Park

'Martin Glover led BSL tours of Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP) for D/deaf groups and hearing groups. It did involve multiple interpreters. I want to let the deaf community into the hearing community and hopefully build some bridges of understanding. I was hoping that this might help hearing people understand sign language a little bit more.'

Emma Spencer,
Learning Manager, Yorkshire
Sculpture Park



If your Wild Escape programme involves working with a school group (mainstream or specialist setting), check that your booking questions get the responses you want.

Looking after your staff

There can be a higher level of secondary trauma, or triggering, associated to working with some groups.

- Use trigger and context warnings where required so people are aware the content may cause harm or emotional distress.
- Ask your team if they have any concerns and what support they require, and make sure that you have support systems in place for staff members working with groups.
- Consider offering support in the form of: mentoring, buddying, access to counselling and wellbeing support, self-help reading, or a working knowledge of trauma informed practice. Organisations such as GLAM Cares (@GLAMCares on Twitter), the Group for Education in Museums (GEM) and Engage (Gallery Educators) can help with this.

Leeds Museums and Galleries

'At Leeds Museums and Galleries, we no longer ask general questions about disability and experiences of pupils, because we found we were getting 'medical model' answers back. Instead, we ask 'what adjustments can we make to help?' and then enquire as to the lived experiences of the class (for instance, children who have recently migrated due to conflict maybe triggered or re-traumatised by a Second World War workshop). We also ask that 1-1 support staff are not counted in pupil-adult ratios, and if there a high volume of adults attending then it often indicates higher support needs within the class.'

Kate Fellows, Head of Learning and Access, Leeds Museums and Galleries

We hope this is a helpful guide, and useful in thinking about the warmest welcome for visitors to your organisations, as part of The Wild Escape and beyond.