

VIRGINIA COMMISSION FOR THE ARTS

Accessibility Requirements & Best Practices

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October 2, 2025

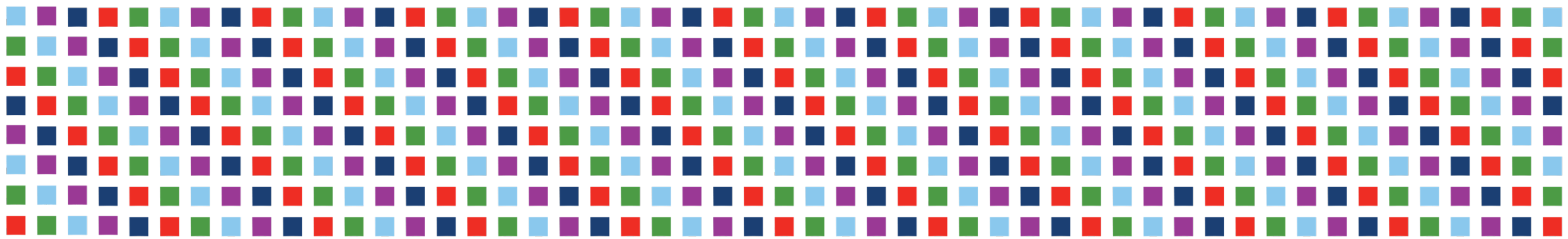


Introductions

- Who we are
- Who you are
 - Put in chat: What type of organization/art form do you represent?

- Review of disability communities and legal requirements
- Improving engagement with people with disabilities
- Best practices for providing access
- Resources

Disability In Communities

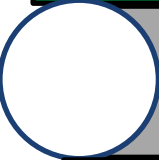


- **Medical – individual must be “fixed”**
 - The problem is rooted in the disability
 - Individual with disability must adapt
- **Social – individual can thrive in accessible world**
 - The problem is rooted in an inaccessible world
 - Once barriers are addressed, people with disabilities can fully participate

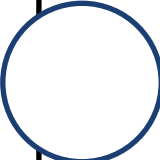
Disability Types



Sensory perception disabilities (incl. vision and hearing disabilities)



Emotional/psychiatric disabilities/mental health



Non-visible/non-apparent (incl. chronic health conditions)



Neurodiversity/neurodivergent (incl. cognitive/intellectual disabilities)



Physical/mobility disabilities

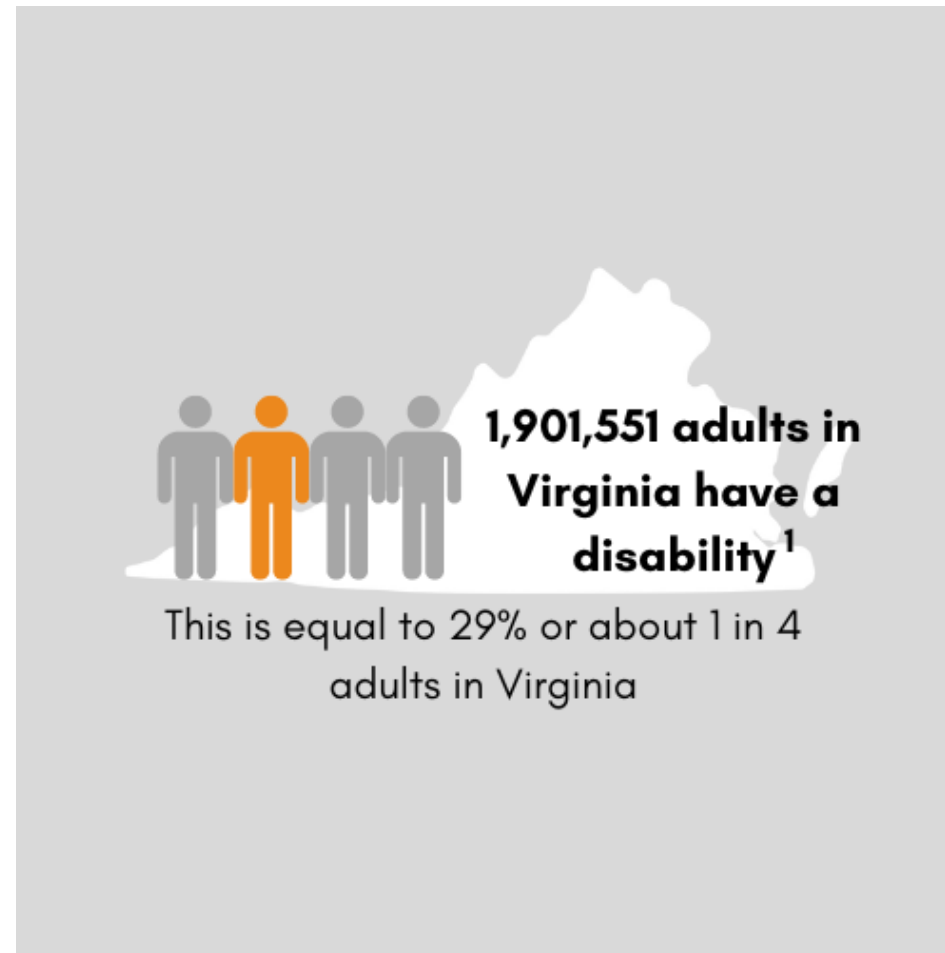
Poll Question #1



- Do you have a close friend or family member, including yourself, with a disability?
 - Yes
 - No

Approximately
1 in 4 or 29% of adults in
Virginia (similar to
national estimate) are
living with disabilities

[U.S. State Profile Data | Disability and Health Data System \(DHDS\) | CDC;](#)



Disabilities Affect Virginians



- 43.2% of 65+ in VA have a disability
- 35.5% of veterans in VA have a disability
- Most common disabilities among VA adults are:
 - Cognitive (13.8%)
 - Mobility (12.0%)

Source: [Virginia Disability and Health Data | CDC](#)

Older Adults Will Surpass Youth



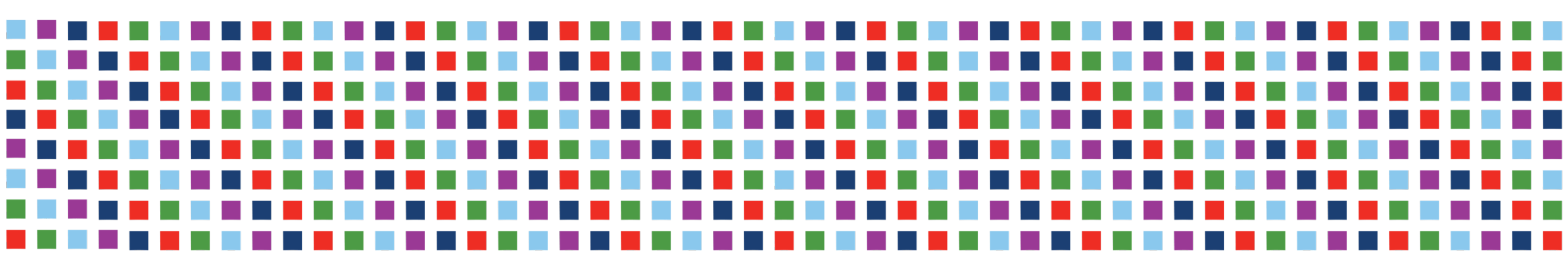
- In 2034, people aged 65 and over (77 million) will outnumber youth under 18 (76.5 million) by half a million.
- [The Graying of America: More Older Adults Than Kids by 2035 \(census.gov\)](#)

Accessibility Is Audience Development



- Maintain and develop applicants, partnerships, participation in events
- Bring in new and exciting programs (disability arts, Deaf theater, physically-integrated dance)
- Disability overlaps with other ways you may be working to attract audiences (i.e., veterans, older populations)

Accessibility Laws, Regulations, and Requirements



Accessibility Is A Requirement



- Under federal laws
 - Recipients of federal funds
 - Recipients of state, county, or city funds

- Section 504 prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs:
 - Conducted by federal agencies (e.g. NEA events)
 - Receiving federal financial assistance (e.g., NEA grantees, State Arts Agencies and their grantees, K-12 schools, colleges, etc.)



- The ADA prohibits discrimination and ensures equal opportunity for persons with disabilities:
 - Title II – State and local government services (State Arts Agencies, Local Arts Agencies)
 - Title III – Public accommodations & services, private organizations, commercial facilities (e.g., museums, performing arts centers, theaters, galleries, classrooms, outdoor spaces, etc.)

This means...



- All organizations, including state arts agency grantees, are legally required to:
 - ensure physical accessibility of spaces they use
 - provide reasonable and necessary accommodations for staff and visitors with disabilities
 - ensure effective communication

- Organizations must be prepared to provide access accommodations:
 - Upon request
 - For specific dates, performances, or activities
 - Included as part of every activity
- Include contact information for requesting access accommodations
- Include details with what access features will be provided in your promotional materials

Designating an Accessibility Coordinator



- Organizations must designate an accessibility coordinator to serve as point of contact for arranging accommodations
 - Requirement under Section 504 (those receiving federal funding) and ADA
- Include your accessibility coordinator's name and contact information (e-mail, phone) on your website/promotional materials.

Accessibility Coordinator Role



- Serves as a consultant on accessibility with your staff, board, and your audience/patrons/visitors
- Does not need to be a full-time position or have specific skills or background
- Accessibility should be everyone's responsibility

Sample Accommodation Request



- “Auto captions will be provided. For other accessibility requests, please call [number] or email [e-address] by [date]”
- Ask about accommodations as part of registration or ticketing process

Poll Question #2



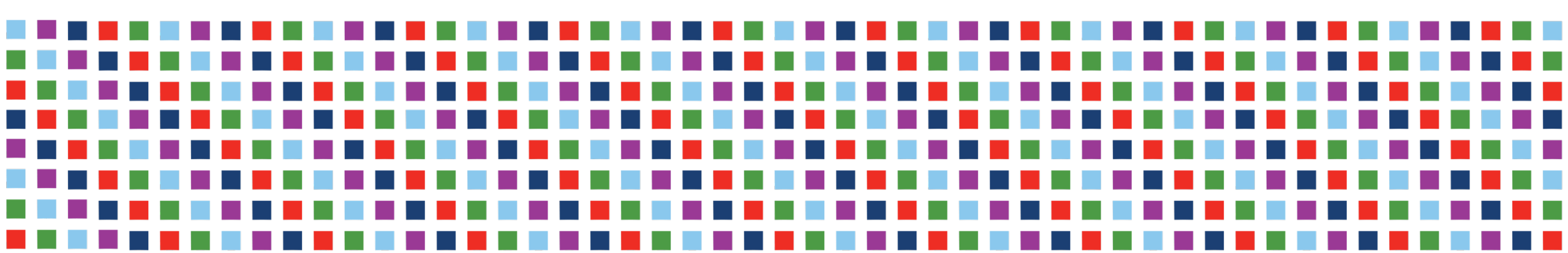
- Has your organization conducted a Section 504 self-assessment in the last three years?
 - Not yet
 - Started, but have not completed it
 - Completed

Section 504 Self-Evaluation



- All NEA grantees or sub-grantees (including VCA grantees) must complete and keep records of a Section 504 self-evaluation
- The NEA has a self-evaluation workbook, as does Open Door Arts
- The evaluation must be kept on file for 3 years and be made available for anyone who asks to see it
- Can assist in developing an access plan

Improving Engagement With People With Disabilities



- Website – accessibility statement and resources
- Include “Plan Your Visit” info, what to expect
- Promote event accessibility & include contact information for questions and accommodation requests

VCA Accessibility Statement



The Virginia Commission for the Arts (VCA) believes that all Virginians have the right to access and experience the arts in our Commonwealth. As a state agency, we strive to meet and exceed federal accessibility standards to benefit our communities. We encourage all partners receiving VCA funds to consider improving their accessibility efforts.

The VCA is dedicated to improving the accessibility of this website. We are proud to maintain our AA accessibility rating according to the ADA's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

If you are unable to access content or have enhancement suggestions, please contact:

Casey Polczynski, Ph.D.

Deputy Director & Accessibility Coordinator

casey.polczynski@vca.virginia.gov

**Chat question: Do you have an
accessibility statement on
your website?**



- Person-first language ('person with a disability') emphasizes the whole person, disability is one part.
- Identity-first language ('disabled person') claims disability as an integral part of self.
 - For example, Deaf community, Autistic self-advocates

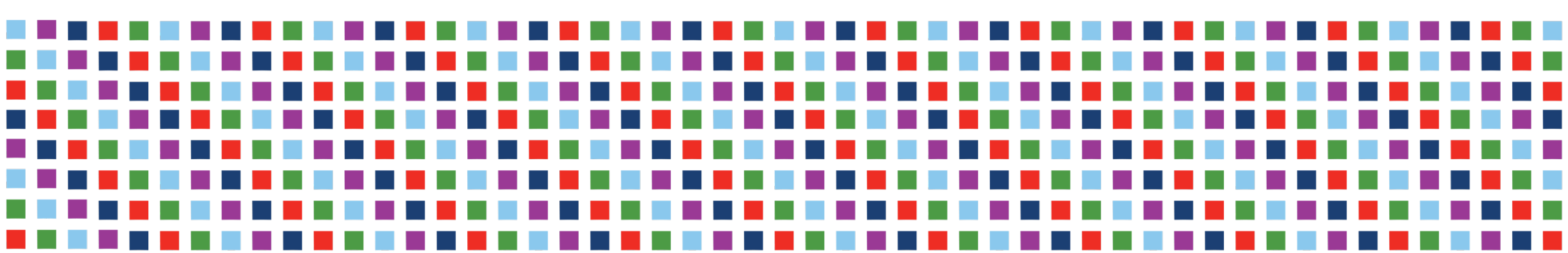
- Ask the person how they choose to self-identify.
- If you don't know, or it is for general public, use person-first language.
- You may want to explain language choice if different.

“Nothing (About Us) Without Us”



- Include people with disabilities throughout your organization:
 - Board, staff, volunteers, panels, committees, etc.
- Conduct community needs assessment
- Partner with organizations serving people with disabilities
- Engage artists with disabilities and disability community (advisory councils, panelist, test user)

Best Practices For Accessibility





Physical Accessibility

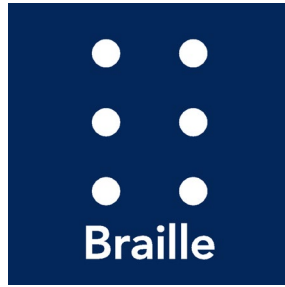
[2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design](#)



How are all the facilities where arts activities are taking place, including historic facilities, accessible to people with physical/mobility disabilities?

- Consider staff, volunteers, artists, participants, audiences and visitors with disabilities.

- Ground-level/no-step entry, ramped access, elevators
- Integrated and dispersed wheelchair seating in meeting/assembly areas
- Wheelchair-accessible restrooms, parking, box office, display cases, exhibit areas
- Artist spaces – back stages, studios, classrooms
- Staff areas – offices, meeting and break rooms, etc.



Program Accessibility

**Effective Communication
And Auxiliary Aids**



- Effective communication is instrumental to program accessibility.
- How is your activity and content being shared, promoted, and implemented?

Vision Disabilities

- Audio description / visual description
- Alternate formats of print materials (large print, Braille)
- Tactile experiences

Hearing Disabilities

- Sign language (ASL) interpretation
- Assistive listening devices
- Captioning
- Transcripts

Do you use captions when watching videos/tv/films/streaming?

- Often
- Sometimes
- Seldom
- Never

Lights, Camera, Caption!



- 80% of viewers are more likely to finish a video with captions
- 80% of 18-to-25-year-olds use captions some or all of the time
- Increase (7.3%) in YouTube views after adding captions
- Helps with understanding and concentration

Source: [Subtitle Stats: How Many People Use Subtitles in 2024? \(kapwing.com\)](https://www.kapwing.com/blog/subtitle-stats)

Cognitive and intellectual disabilities/Neurodivergent

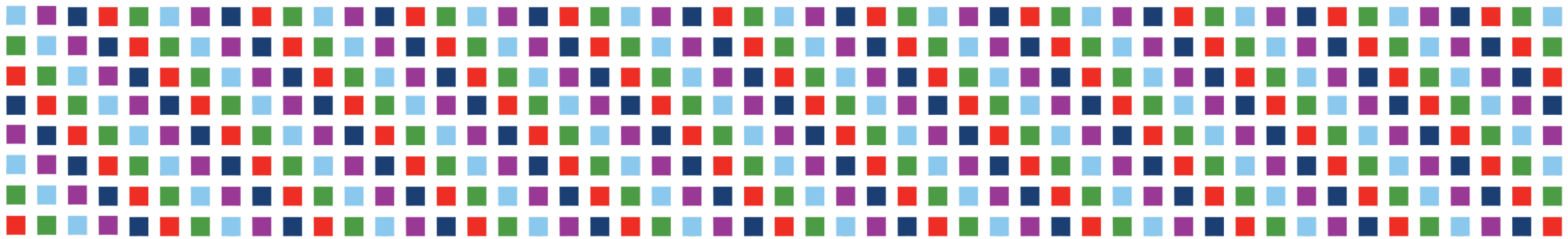
- Plain Language (aim for 6 – 8th grade reading level)
- Sensory-friendly/relaxed programming
(reduced lights and sounds, fragrance free, ability to move around)
- Provide information ahead of time (i.e. agenda, schedule/program) and repeat it

- Staff available to answer questions and/or provide assistance
- Content warnings
- Quiet hours/spaces
- Hybrid/livestream/virtual options

Websites, Virtual Galleries, & Virtual Meetings/Events

- Screen reader navigation, tab-controlled websites
- Alternative text (“alt text”) for images
- Audio/Visual description
- Accessible fonts, color contrast
- Captioning (open/closed), transcripts
- ASL interpretation

Resources



- [NEA Accessibility Resources](#)
- [Virginia Commission for the Arts Accessibility Resources](#)
- [Section 504 Self-Evaluation Workbook](#)
- [Brief Accessibility Checklist](#)
- [ADA National Network \(https://adata.org/\)](https://adata.org/)
- [U.S. Access Board](#) (& animation models)
- [ADA 2010 Design Standards](#)

- [WebAIM](#)
- [WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool](#)
- [Web Accessibility Initiative](#)
- [AccessibilityChecker.org](#)
- [Color contrast checker](#)

Developed as a partnership between the NEA and Art Beyond Sight with resources for:

- Artists / Arts professionals
- Arts employers
- Arts educators
- Arts funders (public, private)

arts.gov/ArtsCareersToolkit

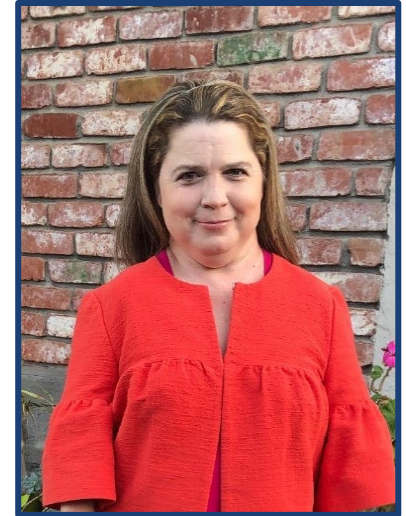




October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)

Our accessibility webinar series is open to all VCA grantees!

- **November 18:** Ensuring Access in Your Organization (*Beth and Katharine*)
- *Register by clicking this link!*



Beth Bienvenu (left) and Katharine Hayward (right)

Our accessibility webinar series is open to all VCA grantees!

- **October 9:** Introduction to the Self-Assessment (*open to all!*)
- *Register by clicking this link!*
- **October 13:** Deadline to express interest in the Study Group
- *Interest link*

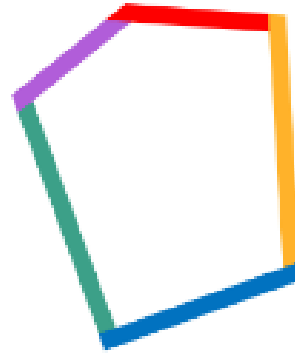


First Webinar: Introduction to the Hub and the Self-Assessment

Learn about a massive, free access resource from the folks who made it!



Self-Assessment Study Group



- **Free consultation** from access expert Dani Rose
- **Complete a self-assessment** to meet 504 requirements
- **Peer learning sessions** to grow with your Virginia network



Upcoming: Accessibility Microgrants

Self-assessments will connect you to action steps and potential funding through VCA!



QUESTIONS



THANK YOU

