

## **Accessibility in Review – TIFF 2023**

### **SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND ACCESSIBILITY COORDINATOR POSITION**

Michael McNeely, with the help of his intervenor, Alex Karn, was commissioned to create a report outlining accessibility features and concerns for 2022 Film Festivals. This work has continued on in 2023.

It is important to recognize the importance in creating an Accessibility Culture – A recommendation you will read about later is that, as part of accessibility training, everyone should read and reflect on the Film Festival Guide to Access, a co-publication of Inside Out and Creative Users Projects, that was published in 2022.

There are presented over 110 recommendations throughout different sections of this report pertaining to festival planning and execution, such as Marketing, American Sign Language Interpretation and Budgeting. For example, here is the first recommendation.

1. This Accessibility in Review Report should be shared widely for accountability purposes. Other organizations can stand to create similar documents for their own work, and we want to show patrons, members, volunteers and staff we have listened to their concerns and needs.

The following are recommendations pursuant to the Accessibility Coordinator position:

2. There should be Accessibility Coordinators every year. I cannot feasibly imagine another position handling accessibility coordination in conjunction with that position's own responsibilities.
3. In line with standard pay rate for Accessibility Coordinators, estimated (at a low amount) at \$50,000 a year, the salary for this position should be commensurate. This would mean that \$50,000 would be divided by 12 months, and multiplied by the number of months this position entails to reach a suitable amount. Please consult the following recommendation, also, when calculating salary over time.
4. A recommendation is to initiate the contract for Accessibility Coordinator earlier in the year, and perhaps to spread it over a longer term, to allow for the booking of interpreters and captionists earlier. This would also allow more time to liaise with departments such as Marketing, and also to build relationships with service providers. The term of Accessibility Coordinator need not be consecutive weeks, but can be times in each month leading up to a bigger time commitment during the Festival Months.

5. Because the duties of the Accessibility Coordinator are recommended to be spread out through the year, the contract should include a breakdown of monthly time and schedule commitments.
6. All Festival events should be held to the same standard of Accessibility.
7. Staff/volunteer training should be an emphasis for the position of Accessibility Coordinator. For accessibility training purposes, this report should be mandatory reading, and all readers are invited to come up with new recommendations that can be added to this living document.

The Accessibility Coordinator must:

- Act as key point of contact for festival and event accessibility requirements as it relates to all film festival programs and initiatives within the organization, provide leadership on accessibility priorities as outlined in the strategic plan;
- Lead the program delivery of accessibility initiatives that can expand the film festival's audiences;
- Book and oversee relationship management of service providers, consultants, and contractors related to accessibility;
- Create an accessibility plan for annual Festival and year round initiatives;
- Assess all of the festival's communication tools, technology, processes and venues - internal as well as public facing;
- Provide consulting to staff across the organization on issues related to accessible service delivery;
- Develop accessibility training in collaboration with department heads to train staff and volunteers pre-festival;
- Develop a framework for evaluating and reporting to senior management on the achievement of accessibility goals;
- Prepare a suggested budget for all and additional accessibility tools or initiatives; and,
- Provide a final report at the end of the contract.

## SECTION 2: MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

### Marketing/Communications – Accessibility Page

**The general point of this section is that accessible features go to waste if not advertised enough. People will assume that there is nothing for them. Furthermore, funders may not value the provision of the services since they were not used due to not enough marketing or communications.**

8. Information needs to be quickly attainable and understood, and less emphasis should be provided on how committed the film festival is towards accessibility. Rather, the emphasis should be on actions over words.

Firstly, at the top of the Accessibility Page, there should be a contact e-mail/phone number for someone who can help address accessibility concerns/issues. Alternatively, there could be a contact form, although people may still prefer to phone if given the opportunity.

Secondly, the address of the festival (as well as its related locations, such as screening venues) needs to be clearly presented, along with a map, and information on parking (and, when available, accessible parking). TTC/bus information should also be available in this section.

Thirdly, a link should be available to a page where people can view ASL videos/advertisements (to be discussed in a later recommendation).

Fourthly, an indication that all venues and offices are wheelchair accessible should be present, as well a list of other accessible features, including accessible bathrooms, closed captioning, and interpreter availability. One should not have to click to “open” these features; rather, they should be “accessible” from the get go, upon loading this page.

Fifthly, it is important not to falsely advertise things that are not available.

Sixthly, a description of any accessibility widget used on the festival’s website as well as how to use it (if applicable) is important to describe here.

Finally, it is appropriate to list the film festival's publications on accessibility issues at the bottom of this page.

9. There should be one contact end-point for all accessibility requests. Different formats can be used to compose messages to the Accessibility Coordinator, such as an online form or a e-mail address, but they all end up with the Accessibility Coordinator, instead of going to multiple staff contacts and creating confusion about who does what.

10. More time is needed to develop and strategize about marketing to Deaf folks. As English may not be Deaf folks' primary language, reading text on the screen can be cumbersome and less appealing than having an ASL video message targeted to this population specifically. It would be beneficial to sign the contents of the Accessibility Page and place that as an alternative to reading the page, above the portion with the address information.

It was discovered that many in the Deaf community are aware of the importance of representation, and so would appreciate Deaf folks signing the advertisements on behalf of the film festival.

The videos should be professionally designed, with the signer and hands being in clear view, and the background a non-obtrusive one. It may also be beneficial to provide a transcript of what was signed below the video for others to enjoy the signing and text simultaneously.

11. A continuous call-out for support persons, such as interpreters, volunteers, captionists, and other kinds of folks that the festival may need should also be present on the Accessibility Page, with a contact form that allows contact information to be shared with the Accessibility Department. This would allow recruitment efforts to continue all year-round, as opposed to an emergency state just prior to (or even during) the Festival.
12. The Accessibility Coordinator, or another appropriate staff member, should be in touch with anyone requesting accommodations before their implementation to ensure that they are getting the appropriate services. There were cases where people requested accessibility features they admitted they did not need in 2022.
13. The Accessibility Coordinator, or another appropriate staff member, should follow up with anyone who has used accessibility services provided by the festival to have them evaluate their implementation and effectiveness.

### **Marketing/Communications – Everything Else**

14. All accessibility features **must** be advertised, in addition to films, merchandise, and other aspects of the Festival. Consider doing a **Did you know?** format which allows for accessibility features to be described to patrons, so that they are aware of their existence and that they may benefit from their use. For example:

***Did you know? All films at our festival have captioning! When you go to the cinema, you will see captioning that is intended for everyone. This is called “open captioning.”***

15. Newsletters and other content should be conveyed in ASL format to reach out to potential Deaf audiences and patrons.

16. Continuous call outs for service providers such as interpreters and captionists should also be present in other forms other than on the Accessibility Page, such as advertisements during screenings and “side notes” within other pages, such as:

***Did you know? We are always looking for ASL interpreters for our events. Please spread the word and register if you are qualified! [Link to Accessibility Page provided.]***

17. It is best to have a version of the program and other marketing materials that is just in black and white for ease of reading. Patrons may request further colour accommodations as well.
18. External consultation should be had with folks who are Deaf, folks who have hearing loss, and folks who have low or no vision to ensure that marketing and communication materials are accessible to them.
19. Visuals on the website should be kept simple and easy to understand.
20. The Marketing Department must be aware of the need for image descriptions for screen readers and folks with low or no vision. More research and resources should be developed to aid those wanting to create more image descriptions for film festivals.
21. Film festivals should create connections with Schools of the Deaf/ Schools of the Blind in order to ensure that students from these schools have the same advantages of learning about film as other schools.
22. Film festivals should liaise with accessibility organizations and service providers to create sponsorship and advertising opportunities, and to get the word out about the festival’s organization. Some of these organizations include: March of Dimes, Centre of Independent Living, Sensity, Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Canadian Hearing Services, and much more.
23. As accessibility work is also being done by other film festivals (and other kinds of festivals/events), accessibility coordinators should continually seek to work with other organizations on accessibility task forces – especially with festivals planned close in time. It is possible that pools of resources can be shared, including interpreter lists.
24. Film festivals should get involved in destigmatization work in relation to that people with disabilities can be queer too or have other overlapping intersectionalities. It is often the case that sexual education and awareness does not extend to people with disabilities who are sometimes oppressed by their caregivers and service providers.

## **Merchandise**

25. Visual descriptions should be available for all merchandise, so that potential customers know what they can buy. These are some examples found online:
- An art print that features a large yellow sun in the bottom right corner that extends to the top right corner, taking up 75% of the image. The remaining 25% shows a light blue sky. Inside the sun, the lyrics to “I’ll Follow The Sun” by The Beatles are printed in black calligraphy writing
  - A plush zebra measuring 8 inches tall and 11 inches long, with smooth black-and-white stripes and metallic gold hooves. The eyes are embroidered with black thread and the zebra’s nose is mint green.
  - A 5 inch by 7 inch notebook with a hard green cover and exposed spiral binding. The cover features large white stripes that alternate with green, and the inside has unlined paper.
  - Light yellow loafer slip-on shoes made from merino wool fabric, with white soles and gray lining.
26. Arrangements should be made to provide tactile samples of the products being sold so that customers can touch/feel them, and also can ask questions about their designs.
27. A Deaf actor should be hired to model and advertise the merch store.

## **Sponsorship**

28. Donors should not be separated into groups based on how much they have provided. Everyone can equally be a sponsor. The packages may be different, but there should be no recognition of donating a higher amount than someone else. This is for financial accessibility and to incentivise lower-income sponsors.
29. Consider other ways of sponsoring as well: through services in kind, or donations of materials and services, for example.

## **Online Navigation**

30. At all times, there should be information about the films available on the same page as the film listings, ticket purchases, and film play page.
31. With regards to the online experience, it would be beneficial for patrons to have access to live customer support, which can be delivered by virtual volunteers. Dealing with an online format to purchase tickets in lieu of actually visiting a film festival in person can be an alienating and isolating experience. When people are struggling with accessibility or comprehension of the website, they can become frustrated and lose interest.

32. Step-by-step guides should be made available for how to purchase a film ticket or how to use a pass. Preferably these would be in Word format with pictures, and also signed with demonstrations of how to navigate the websites.
33. Accessibility audits should be requested for the website, and a consultant who uses a screen reader should also be hired to address any concerns that people with screen readers may have.

## SECTION 3: FESTIVAL ACCESSIBILITY

### SECTION 3A - VIRTUAL FESTIVAL

34. Further awareness needs to be provided about the films being geographically restricted to Ontario only (and perhaps, why that is the case).
35. For virtual screenings, it should be made clear that the 48-hour window (or whatever time window it is) of viewing a film is only for within the Festival week – i.e. if someone starts a film on the closing day of the Festival, they lose hours and may not be able to enjoy the experience (if applicable).
36. All films, including the ones in the virtual platform, should be 100% captioned or subtitled, as was the goal at Inside Out 2022. Captioning in this context describes sound effects and provides speaker names, but even if these are not available, subtitling is still acceptable, and much better than nothing. This achievement should also be marketed as such – as many festivals do not bother.
37. For viewing films online, there should be a default to have English subtitles on without having to manually toggle them. This issue is prominent for viewing short film series as prior to each film, one may have to rush to turn on subtitles.
38. Subtitles should have (optional) black backgrounds for high contrast reading. It is hard to read subtitles when there are white text on white backgrounds. Proper captions/subtitles would look like this:



Other colours for both subtitle text and background can also be available as well for ease of viewing.

39. Subtitle size should also be adjustable via the virtual screening platform, just as it is on Netflix and iTunes.



40. Subtitle/captioning placement should be consistent, and is typically located at the bottom, but not too low. Filmmakers ought to keep this in mind when they use labels or other text effects that may run against subtitles/captioning (such as a subject's name/profession).
41. As screen-sharing socially to watch films online is not feasible due to licensing issues, Discord channels could be used to allow viewers to talk with each other (in text form, for Deaf people to follow). They should be moderated by staff, who could type/summarize any audio comments.
42. It should be noted that people with disabilities who attend the Festival virtually may require use of support persons much in the same way they also may require the use of support persons in-person. We should allow screen sharing in these cases.
43. There should be a space where people can come together online and have supportive people to talk to. For inspiration, one should consult with ReelAbilities Film Festival to investigate the potential for a "Drop-In Care Club." This space would be a "disability-safe" and affirming space. This can be another responsibility or remit for the online volunteer, supervised by staff. This can be an 2-hour event that is held once a day during the Festival in order to assess the benefit.
44. When using livestream platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitch, it is important to ensure that users have instructions on how to use each platform, and why one may be more preferable than another. For example, I was using Twitch's streaming platform, but realized that I could not type in questions to the presenters of the panel I was watching. Perhaps, I just did not know how, but felt isolated when the presenters wanted audience participation.
45. Consultations and focus groups should be held with users of the online/virtual platform who have disabilities to solicit more feedback

### **SECTION 3B - HYBRID FESTIVAL**

46. A hybrid Festival should always be the case.

Many people were excluded from participating in events that were not also available online or virtually, and many still are continuing to be excluded. It is important to continue catering to all individuals, regardless of where they may be able to enjoy the festival from.

Even for those people that participated in events online, there was no ready sense of community and fellowship, and feelings of isolation and alienation would have been more profound, especially if one had technical challenges (with no online volunteer support).

This means that, to all extent possible, captioned and ASL-interpreted livestreams should be available for all post-film events such as Q and As and award ceremonies. There should be full coverage of livestreams. The livestreams should also allow for participatory involvement via chats and other interactive features that bring the online and in-person audiences together.

47. **No films should be in-person that are not also virtual.** People with disabilities and/or people who are immunocompromised should not have to risk their lives just so they can see a limited release, nor should festivals be encouraging exclusion by hosting events that not everyone can participate in.

## **DESCRIPTIVE AUDIO / AUDIO DESCRIPTION / VISUAL DESCRIPTIONS**

48. Descriptive audio should be utilized for at least 3 or 4 titles, which would allow for participants who are blind or have low vision to participate. Alternatively, volunteers could be trained to help “describe” certain films to blind or low vision attendees. Accessible Media Inc. would be a good resource to consult on this topic, as well as Hot Docs, which have had films with descriptive audio at previous festivals.
49. Upon the use of descriptive audio, please ensure that consultation and feedback processes are present to ensure the services can be improved for future use.
50. For all event presentations (i.e. introductions, Q&As, panels), moderators should provide visual descriptions of speakers and attendees, ensure that people take turns speaking, and every time there is a change in speaker, moderators should ensure that the change is noted (i.e. Michael is speaking.)

## **WHEELCHAIR ACCESS**

51. All accessible infrastructure and equipment, including wheelchair ramps needs to be kept clean and sanitized.
52. At all times, the buildings’ wheelchair access buttons (entryway and bathrooms) must be operational and should be routinely checked. In case the buttons do not work, volunteers and staff can help open doors.
53. It is always important to ensure that patrons who use wheelchairs continue to have unobstructed access at festival venues.
54. High tables and counters must be avoided at all times whenever possible, since people with wheelchairs will be unable to use those surfaces. If a section, such as a bar, is high, then there should be an alternate section for people with wheelchairs to access.

55. It is imperative that film festivals consult with wheelchair users and others with mobility challenges to identify potential obstacles and hazards for next year. This includes consultation in relation to the next section as well.

## **ACCESSIBLE PARKING**

56. Accessible parking should be available for people with disabilities.
57. Information needs to be provided to all festival patrons, staff, and volunteers about how best to get a parking spot if needed. The information would be present on the Accessibility Page as well as via other formats, including advertising slides.

## **RELAXED PERFORMANCES**

58. Film festivals should commit to hosting at least 3 or 4 relaxed performances.

Relaxed performances are unique opportunities to accommodate people with disabilities.

- Audience size would be capped at 25% or 50% of full capacity.
- Lights would be dimmed but still would stay on.
- Film volume would be reduced (still would use subtitles/captioning).
- Talking, looking at devices, and moving around would be allowed and encouraged, as different audience members have different needs.

Suffice it to say, people with disabilities are often the last ones thought of when it comes to planning events or ensuring an equal level playing field. We have a moral obligation to ensure that everyone has access to in-person events, even if that access looks different for some people with disabilities.

What is the point of having accessible features in cinemas if they are not going to be used? They can only be used by people with disabilities who feel safe and able to attend. This means ready access to the building (including accessible parking), social distancing, full mask-wearing, safe places to drink and eat, opportunities to converse with others, and encouragement to engage with support persons/volunteers.

### **For these screenings:**

59. Scattered seating should be utilized for limited audience capacity.
60. Registrations for these events should have information about the importance of relaxed performances. People should confirm that they are interested in a “Relaxed Screening” where patrons are able to move around as needed during the screening itself; lights are slightly dimmed; talking is allowed; and assistive devices may be used. They are not allowed to complain if there is too much talking!

61. An honour system should be used whereupon individuals who register for a relaxed screening are deemed to gain benefit from it. (An used-as-needed basis.)
62. Each ticket allows for a support person to attend, without exceeding the 25% or 50% capacity limit.
63. Consultation and encouragement of others to provide feedback should continue for these screenings as well.

## **SENSORY SPACES**

64. It is important to remember that everyone has a need for a break, especially within the hustle and bustle of a busy Festival space. People appreciate opportunities to decompress in a safe space, knowing that they are supported there for whatever their needs may be. To this end, a medium-sized room/area should be reserved for people to decompress in a quiet setting, with comfortable seating and relaxing music. Once again, this accessibility feature must also be advertised and marketed to ensure people understand the intent. Feedback should also be solicited via consultations about safe spaces and destressing within a hectic environment.

## **CAPTIONING/SUBTITLES FOR IN-PERSON SCREENINGS**

65. All films, including the ones in-person, should be 100% captioned or subtitled, as was the goal this year. **Captioning** in this context describes sound effects and provides speaker names, but even if these are not available, **subtitling** (which does not often use descriptive features) is still acceptable, and much better than nothing. This achievement should also be marketed as such – as many festivals do not bother.

Michael typically uses both captioning/subtitles interchangeably, but there is a slight distinction.

It is important to note that films that are typically “foreign films” but have scenes with English speaking may not caption/subtitle the English portions. Filmmakers need to be asked to caption/subtitle these scenes.

66. For people with vision challenges, seats should be reserved (as Accessible Seats) that allow them to view the captioning/subtitles as needed. The opportunities for these seats also should be marketed.
67. Subtitles/captions should have black backgrounds for high contrast reading. It is hard to read subtitles when there is white text on white backgrounds. They would optimally look like this:



68. Subtitle/caption size should be standardized and relatively large. More research can be done in this area in the upcoming year, if needed. People should be made aware in advance of how large the subtitles/captions are.
69. Subtitle/captioning placement should be consistent, and is typically located at the bottom, but not too low. Filmmakers ought to keep this in mind when they use labels or other text effects that may run against subtitles/captioning (such as a subject's name/profession).

## LIVE CAPTIONING

70. Live captionists (otherwise known as CART [Communication Access Realtime Translation] service providers) should be booked at least a month in advance. Rates of captionists can be \$200/hour.
71. Live captionists, just like ASL interpreters, also require information about events. Use this list below:

More information about events needs to be available **ahead of time as soon as possible**, especially for captionists who may be nervous about working at an unfamiliar event. Parlaying information and requests for information were two of the biggest time commitments for this position, and having these details sorted out would allow for other accessibility work to take place.

Information for an event includes:

- If in person: location/how to get there (and if there is any parking: if so, how much?);
- Time allotment (including breaks);
- Whether or not they have a teammate (they may bring one themselves);
- If in person: the dress code;
- Setting/context (is it a bar, is it a theatre performance, etc.);
- Whether a ticket is needed;
- How they are accessing the audio source (if not in person);
- An agenda;

- Is the event going to be streamed, broadcast, recorded, etc.? (This may affect fees of service);
- Copies of introductions, speeches, lyrics, even stage directions, videos, presentations;
- Breakdown of important names and vocabulary terms (spell them out for the captionists to avoid confusion and inconsistencies);
- The name and contact information of person responsible for the captionist at the event as well as the name and contact information of the Accessibility Coordinator should there be any issues; and,
- Captionists will want to know how participants will access/see their captioning work. (We used a website called StreamText for the captioning we booked for some panels, which allowed audience members to read the captioning while watching the event.)

## **IMMUNOCOMPROMISED FOLKS**

72. Three stickers were designed for Inside Out 2022 that allowed people to express their degree of comfort with close contact. They are 1.5 inches in size. Pictures and descriptions are below of each one:



This is a red sticker that indicates that the wearer would prefer no contact and that everyone stay apart 6 feet away from them.



This sticker is yellow, and advises the wearer is “still being cautious.” This may be a bit vague for some to understand.



This sticker is green, and states that the person wearing it is comfortable with high-fives and handshakes, but also reminds us to ensure that handwashing occurs often.

Stickers should be offered at every event and their use should be explained to all patrons. Attendees should not have to ask for the stickers but should be able to choose them when needed.

It is important to consider that some may not be able to see the stickers, or distinguish between colours, so they may ask for oral confirmation from staff/volunteers about who is wearing what sticker. People could also be organized in sections given their preferences of contact if appropriate.

73. Windowed masks around the mouth area (from Humask) have been ordered in bulk for festival/conference events. Supplies of these should also be maintained and handed out at events. These allow Deaf patrons to read lips and may benefit other users as well (i.e. they allow one to see facial expressions). It is important to remember that even if the mask is being worn, light quality and one's level of fatigue may affect one's ability to lipread.
74. No eating should be allowed in the presence of immunocompromised folks, as that would mean the lowering of masks which may put them in danger. This would mean that there should be no eating in cinemas during a screening of a film. Patrons could eat in a separate room, a designated non-masking area. Even if you do not do this for all screenings, some screenings would still provide a benefit for those who are immunocompromised.
75. It is important that staff/volunteers abide by masking protocols and only unmask in non-masking areas. Photo opportunities that involve taking masks off can still be found in the non-masking areas. It is important that staff/volunteers be firm and consistent with their attitudes towards masking and non-masking, in order to encourage compliance from patrons. Regulations are now currently being made more lenient which can pose a danger to immunocompromised persons.

76. Regular engagement with immunocompromised persons is critical so as to ensure that we do not marginalize this group.

## **SCENT-FREE POLICY**

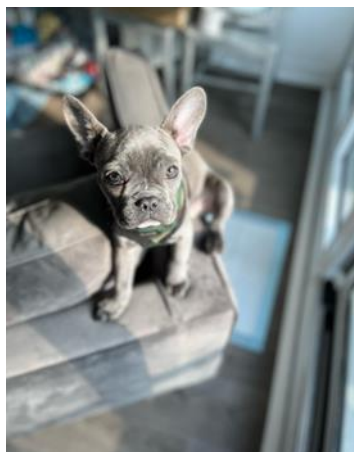
77. Film Festivals should implement a scent-free policy to accommodate people with high sensitivity to scent. An example is as follows:

Refrain from wearing cologne, perfume, scented personal care products such as body lotions, sprays, and powders, scented deodorant and hair care products, and aftershave lotions (add , laundry products, and essential oils); avoid bringing in scented flowers including but not limited to: Freesias, Lilacs, lavenders, lilies (including day, tiger, Easter Lilies, lily of the valley, and star gazers), Hyacinth and Peonies; refrain from bringing scented air fresheners or personal hand lotions from home.

## **ALLERGIES**

78. If someone informs staff that they have an allergy, then staff should do their best to ensure that the allergen is not present in events the person is attending, or, alternatively, inform them that the allergen is present, so that they can make an informed decision.

## **SERVICE AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS**



**Jacques, a beautiful emotional support animal**

79. It is important to be aware that people with disabilities may require the assistance of a service or emotional support animal. Policies should be created that allow for their presence, and which specify the difference between service and emotional support animals. There should also be rules around their handling as well, and what to do if there is a conflict involving the animal.
80. Patrons should be invited to register their support animal for film festival events so that everyone is aware of them. A general advisory can be sent out indicating that



service/support animals may be at events, and that, if there are any concerns, the Accessibility Coordinator should be contacted. The person who is allergic and the person who is using the service/emotional support animal can be hosted in different areas/rooms in the facility if they come into the event. If events are livestreamed, then one or both parties can enjoy the event virtually as well.

## **MENTAL HEALTH**

81. Film Festivals should consider the use of content warnings for more sensitive subject matter, and use volunteers/staff as sounding boards to people who need others to talk to about how a film has affected them (consider doing so in the Virtual Space as well).
82. Attending a Festival can be stressful – so some tips and tricks to manage stress well in the Festival setting may be helpful for patrons to have, such as where to go if one is feeling overwhelmed.

## **SUPPORT PERSONS**

83. Film Festival policies regarding support persons having free tickets for the individuals they support should continue. This should be easier to request via registration processes.

The person with a disability should indicate that they are bringing a support person to an in-person event, or wanting to use a support person for the virtual platform. At this point, arrangements can be made to ensure the support person has access as well. Support persons need not have institutional qualifications – they can be friends or family members.

It is also important to keep in mind that someone with a support person may also have a group of friends or family that they wish to sit with as well. It is not recommended separating any group of individuals that come together, even if one needs a support person.

## **SECTION 4 – AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE (ASL) INTERPRETERS**

Maintaining relationships with interpreters is an important aspect of the position of Accessibility Coordinator. It is important to know that each interpreter is different with their own standards of practice, and many interpreters were upfront with their feelings about their duties.

84. A list of working interpreters available for film festival events must always be kept up-to-date. This avoids any last-minute rushes and upsells for needed services. For example, one can begin booking **right** after this year's festival for next year's Festival.
85. Be receptive to feedback from Deaf patrons about an interpreter's professionalism and seek to always ensure a respectful environment. Some interpreters in 2022 went out of

their way to inform themselves on festival topics to ensure that they were ready to have conversations with patrons.

86. In terms of representation, we should seek out Deaf Interpreters (DIs) to work alongside hearing interpreters. Deaf Interpreters help modulate the language that hearing interpreters convert into ASL, ensuring that the meaning is more concise for the Deaf patron.

87. There are some differences of opinion between interpreters about best practices.

For example, there was a split between thoughts of whether having ASL interpreters for events that did not have any Deaf patrons was “performative allyship.” One interpreter indicated that it was an empty gesture, while another indicated that it was an opportunity for audience members to realize the importance of an interpreter and then to get word of mouth out about the presence of one to their Deaf contacts.

It may be worthwhile to conduct polls with the Deaf community or to continue consulting to explore this and other issues more meaningfully. Festivals can then create policies that indicate the organization’s own beliefs.

88. More information about events needs to be available **ahead of time as soon as possible**, especially for interpreters who may be nervous about working at an unfamiliar event. Parlaying information and requests for information were two of the biggest time commitments for this position, and having these details sorted out would allow for other accessibility work to take place. Information for an event includes:

- If in person: location/how to get there (and if there is any parking: if so, how much?);
- Time allotment (including breaks);
- Whether a partner or team interpreter will be working as well;
- If in person: the dress code;
- Setting/context (is it a bar, is it a theatre performance, etc.);
- If in person, whether a ticket is needed;
- How many people are present;
- An agenda;
- Names of any Deaf people in attendance (interpreters can scan guest lists to see if they recognize anyone);
- Have the Deaf attendees made any specific requests? (I.e. I want to work with John tonight, or can more fingerspelling be done, or can ASL be slowed down?);
- Is the event going to be streamed, broadcast, recorded, etc.? (This may affect fees of service);
- Copies of introductions, speeches, lyrics, even stage directions, videos, presentations;
- Breakdown of important names and vocabulary terms (spell them out for the interpreters to avoid confusion and inconsistencies); and,

- The name and contact information of person responsible for the interpreter at the event as well as the name and contact information of the Accessibility Coordinator should there be any issues
- How others will see their interpretation (on stage, on camera, etc.)

An abundance of information is better than nothing. It is important to keep interpreters in the loop about when they can expect the information and to ensure it is accessible to them (as they may be on their phones or unable to print in time, depending on when they get it).

89. Interpreters often work in teams of two or more, so please devote enough funding for this. This allows interpreters to switch off and to keep an eye on various details throughout the event. This allows, perhaps, for one interpreter to work directly with a Deaf attendee while the other works with everyone else.

Although one interpreter has been used for one hour in the past, this is not ideal from the interpreters we have consulted with, who have indicated that they feel most comfortable working in a team.

90. Strive to book interpreters as early as possible. A good benchmark is one month in advance. Interpreters prefer to know their teammates in advance so that they can plan how to work best effectively with one another, and therefore you may need to ensure that each interpreter has the others' contact information. A festival should also ensure that its records of interpreters' phone numbers and e-mail addresses are accurate. This year, we needed to ensure that all interpreters had proof of vaccination status, which may not be an issue next year – but any details such as these can be dealt with within the month in advance of the event.
91. All interpreters should be paid the same amount. Everyone should be offered a set fee that is fair to all contractors. (At least one interpreter disagrees with the previous recommendation and urges us to think about how we would fairly compensate for experience, preparation for all-day (or lengthy) interpretations, and membership to marginalized or oppressed groups.)
92. Consultation and meaningful conversations need to continue with interpreters in order to foster positive relationships and maintain the quality of service.
93. Deaf people should also be consulted with regards to how interpreters do their work, as well as the issues around the use of the term “American Sign Language” or ASL. A consultant has informed us that ASL is a racist, oppressive term; we have concerns that if we stop using ASL, we lose the specificity of the particular language that is being used to interpret. For example, if we ask to someone please interpret sign language, which sign language is it?

94. We should be providing compensation for parking and mileage on a standardized basis.
95. If events are livestreamed, then interpreters can work remotely, potentially enabling us to have more resources. Some interpreters were not able to work in-person in 2022 due to COVID-19 restrictions.
96. For events that are livestreamed and which use virtual interpreters, in-person audiences should have access to devices whereupon they can communicate with the virtual interpreters as needed. Festivals should provide those – for example, having 3 tablets available for audience members to use.
97. When working with interpreters (especially with potential delays in working with a virtual interpreter) it is important to slow down your pace of speech and to periodically check in with the interpreter to see how they are keeping up (as recommended, sometimes just a look will suffice, as you can see if the interpreter is struggling or working quickly – when they stop, they are caught up).
98. At least two interpreters should be on call, or on reserve, for every film festival event.
99. Contracts need to be written up and signed prior to interpreting work, in order to avoid any surprise fees or fees that were not discussed by interpreters. It is important that everyone is on the same page as disputes over fees would not benefit anyone.

## **SECTION 5 – VOLUNTEERS/STAFF**

100. It is important to remember that accommodations may very well be needed for volunteers and staff, and that in the recruitment of volunteers and staff, candidates should be reminded that they are able to access these accommodations at any time. Marketing should also be done to reach out to potentially interested volunteers and staff about the kind of equitable workplace that the film festival is.
101. Any events planned to celebrate the accomplishments of volunteers, staff or the festival as a whole, must also be accessible, otherwise people with disabilities will be excluded from team-building activities. Slack channels and other organizational communication tools should only be used for activities that everyone can participate in.
102. When setting up the physical aspects of in-person events, it is important to remember that within the hustle and bustle, it may be hard for someone with a disability to find something to do. It would be meaningful to ensure that they have opportunities to help out when possible.
103. Safety concerns are always paramount when setting up events – avoid tripping hazards and ensure that everyone has an understanding of what is expected to take place
104. When staff are requesting accommodations for events, they need to be clear whether or not they are requesting accommodations for the whole event, or just a part of it. For example, some panels required certain kinds of accommodations (i.e. CART, ASL interpretation) but not others, and a whole day booking of these accommodations may have been wasteful.
105. Event tracking sheets are useful when used by the entire organization. Having all the events in one place will allow for better consolidation of accessibility supports.
106. The use of internal daily logs and newsletters allows everyone to be informed about the interpreters that were working each day. This should continue, so that all interpreters feel welcome at the Festival and are supported by staff and volunteers.
107. Meetings should be planned in advance and held in smaller chunks to allow for greater retention of information. Consider having breaks at least every hour, for ten minutes. Alternatively, people could “be up” to speak at certain times, and then be allowed downtime or off-screen time when others are taking their turns.

An agenda is very helpful to have in advance so that participants can prepare their speaking points ahead of time. To avoid fatigue, they should not be held at the end of a day.

108. Staff/volunteers should be able to indicate their preferred communication methods (these would be considered “accessibility requests”), and perhaps, in periods of stress, others can help with overburdened inboxes.
109. Accessibility requests should be tracked and assessed in order to ensure that they are being met as effectively as possible.
110. As indicated in the Introduction, please read and reflect on The Film Festival Guide to Access. It provides a lot of information about accessibility in general and how to become more aware of accessibility needs. Please think of how to incorporate difference-centred design in your day-to-day work for the film festival.
111. Generally speaking, organizations should aim to purchase higher level versions of accessibility software and tools – not use “free” versions. This allows staff the ability to ensure greater accountability from the programmers of these accessibility tools and to ensure rapid customer service should there be any issues with the software and tools.
112. Livestreaming should not be solely an Accessibility Budget item – rather it should be shared amongst the Festival departments as livestreaming benefits all departments with an increased reach to patrons.

## **BONUS LEVEL**

113. Please revise this report every year. We worked hard on the numbering.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Festival can benefit from increased emphasis on accessibility marketing, as the services provided are not as effective if they are not known widely amongst patrons. People with disabilities have traditionally been excluded from spaces such as prestigious Film Festivals, and it is very well worth it to ensure that each and every one of them feels like they get a personalized invitation to come the way they are – whether it be in person or, as we stress in this report, especially for immunocompromised folks, within the virtual space and/or at a safe screening.

Although the stress is always paramount in a staffer’s mind during the Festival, the camaraderie amongst the team is not to be minimized. Everyone works hard, and sometimes, that may cause accessibility concerns due to overwork and fatigue. It is hard not to feel as if the whole Festival depends on you, and some of us take that rather seriously. The Festival, as an organization, needs to be more than just its individual members, however, and breaks are always needed.