

Film Festival

Best Practices

for Accessibility

Presented by **1IN4 Coalition**
with support from the
Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF)



tiff

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Preface

About 1IN4 Coalition

1IN4 is a coalition of disabled Hollywood creatives on a mission to reframe the experience and understanding of disability by breaking down the systemic barriers that exclude disabled people from being employed in front of and behind the camera. In the United States, [more than 1 in 4 adults \(28.7%\) have a disability](#).

For more information visit us at www.1in4coalition.org and follow us on social media @1in4coalition.

Message from TIFF

TIFF is committed to identifying, preventing, and removing barriers to participation for people with disabilities. We are invested in continuously improving the accessibility of our programs, services, and spaces with input from people with disabilities, accessibility advisors, and our Accessibility Steering Committee. This includes making relevant information easy to find on tiff.net/accessibility-at-tiff, and expanding on accessibility focused offerings throughout the year and during the Festival.

We remain focused on our Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2022-2026 and are establishing new, ambitious targets for our teams to push for progress over the next three years. We appreciate the 1IN4 Coalition and other collaborators working to help make all festivals more accessible for all.

Introduction

Film festivals are vital to the ecosystem of film and powerful forces in shaping our culture. They bring together artists, industry professionals and audiences, creating an epicenter of talent, ideas, and opportunity. Yet disabled people often encounter systemic barriers that limit their participation. The ripple effects of this access, or lack thereof, enormously impacts the stories told, the people who see them, and the way we understand the world.

In 2023, 1IN4 partnered with the Toronto International Film Festival to examine what meaningful accessibility looks like in practice. With TIFF's support, we conducted an audit of its 48th edition, examining accessibility across the festival experience. Drawing on our findings, this document offers best practices designed to help festivals around the world become more accessible, inclusive, and impactful.

Film Festival Accessibility

Disability Statistics

[1.3 billion people](#), or 16% of the worldwide population, have an apparent or non-apparent¹ disability. The disabled population and its community control [\\$13 trillion in disposable income annually](#), including [\\$675 billion in the United States](#).

Defining Disability

Disability has historically been the diagnosis of a condition which impacts a person's brain functions, movements, senses and communication. Today, it has evolved to encompass history, culture, community, and identity.

Defining Accessibility

Accessibility refers to the designing of services, activities, facilities, environments, information, and products to be experienced by disabled individuals for maximum participation. Unlike accommodations which are made to address existing barriers, accessibility is proactive planning to create equal access.

At film festivals, accessibility impacts these three main areas.

- **Communication:** The use of accessible information and inclusive language across all marketing materials, digital platforms, and spaces.
- **Screenings and Events:** The equal access to all theaters, facilities, and programs.
- **Representation:** The inclusion of disability in the storytelling, talent pool, and audiences.

Impact of Increasing Accessibility

An accessible environment leads to greater inclusion, which in turn drives diversification across the film industry, creating benefits in many directions. It impacts the artists they support, the audiences they seek, and the culture they shape.

Accessibility improves the environment for everyone, a principle known as the [Curb Cut Effect](#). Sidewalk cuts, originally designed exclusively for wheelchair users, ultimately benefit countless others.

¹ **Non-Apparent Disability** - A disability that is not immediately identifiable. For example, chronic conditions and neurodiversity.

1IN4's Film Festival Best Practices for Accessibility

Overall Recommended Support Services

- **Create an Access Office or Concierge** to center and lead accessibility efforts.
- **Designate an Access Team** with staff to be readily available to help disabled attendees on all matters related to venues, tickets, and access points².
- **Offer Access Passes³ and free Companion Passes or tickets** to disabled attendees. Allow ticket holders to enter a designated waiting area with ample seating before each screening, and provide:
 - Early entry to theater.
 - Reserved seating.
 - Help with accessibility requests.
- **Publish information on accessibility** throughout the festival and at each venue.
- **Ensure all printed festival materials (e.g. programs, guides)** are available in accessible formats (e.g. large print, braille).
- **Provide forums** for submitting access requests in advance (e.g. email, text, phone, in-person).
- **Provide multiple ways for disabled attendees to report accessibility issues** (e.g. online, phone, text, in-person) during the festival.

Website Information

- **Make accessibility information easy to find, understand, and use.** Provide:
 - **Accessibility information** on each film page. Allow users to filter the full film schedule by access points. Include, audio description⁴, open captions⁵, closed captions⁶, CART/live captions⁷, and sign language interpretation⁸.
 - **Arrival times** to have access points addressed.

² **Access Points** - Resources that decrease physical, sensory, cognitive, and technological barriers to participation. They can be anything from a ramp to audio descriptions, to a sign-language interpreter, to limited sound distractions.

³ At TIFF, this is called a 'Lobby Pass'

⁴ **Audio Description** - A secondary audio track with narration between dialogue that provides information about key visual elements in a film or media work.

⁵ **Open Captions** - Captions visible to all viewers by default.

⁶ **Closed Captions** - Captions that are visible to individual viewers and can be turned on or off.

⁷ **CART/Live Captions** - Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) is text captioned on-screen during events by a trained professional.

⁸ **Sign Language Interpretation** - Real-time translation between sign language and a spoken language to allow communication between parties. Each country can have a different form of sign language.



- Where to pick up **assistive devices**.
- Options for **physical tickets**.
- Information on **parking, passenger drop-off areas, and street closures**.
- **Release film accessibility information when tickets go on sale.** If accessibility information is not available when tickets go on sale:
 - **Clearly note online** whether accessibility information for each film is final or pending.
 - **Set aside a reserved number of tickets** for each screening to be distributed to attendees with access points once accessibility information is confirmed.
 - **Offer a lenient, simple refund or exchange** for any program missing a promised accessibility feature.
 - **Clearly notify attendees** of these options (e.g. email, newsletter, social media).
- **Confirm that information about accessibility practices match** on festival and individual venue websites.
- **Complete all major website changes** before tickets go on sale.
- **Ensure the website complies with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)** standards.
- **Publish all downloadable documents in multiple formats** (e.g. HTML, Word, PDF, large print, plain language) and ensure they are screen reader accessible.

Screenings

- Include screenings for each film with **open captions⁹, closed captions, and audio descriptions**.
- **Provide ample assistive devices** at each venue, for captioning, audio description, and hearing assist.
 - **Run daily quality assurance checks** to ensure that captioning, audio description, and hearing assist devices are **functional, clearly labeled, and set to the correct channel**.
 - Verify that open and closed captioning files and audio description tracks are **high quality and compatible with the theater's systems**.
 - Confirm live captioning is **accurate and visible from different areas of the theater**.
- **Provide CART/live captions and/or sign language interpretation**, including during:
 - Introduction and closing remarks.
 - Pre-film announcements.
 - Videos, trailers, and ads.
 - Q&As.
- **Situate sign language interpreters** in a well-lit area and near to the speaker for whom they are interpreting.

⁹ Burnt-in (open) captions do not require a device, lowering the chances of technical access barriers and device malfunctions.



- **Offer designated sensory-sensitive screenings** with reduced volume, dimmed lighting, and permission for attendees to move or leave and re-enter as needed.
- **Ask filmmakers to include** open and closed captions and audio description, as part of the film submission process.
 - **Provide resources, grants, and supports** for filmmakers who need assistance creating them.
- **Present hybrid screenings (virtual and in-person)**, supporting wider audience accessibility.

Venues

- **Ensure each venue hosting an official festival screening or event is accessible.** This includes:
 - **Step-free entrances** to buildings and theaters.
 - **Functional push buttons** to open building and restroom doors.
 - **Elevator access** to any upper-floor screening or event space.
 - If elevator access is not available, **host events on the ground floor.**
 - **Temporary ramps** over sidewalk curbs outside the venue.
 - **Accessible parking spaces** outside the venue or in a nearby parking garage.
 - **Sufficient accessible seating** (wheelchair and companion) in all theaters.
 - **A mix of high and low seating and table options**, with enough space for wheelchair users to maneuver comfortably.
 - **Accessible restrooms** large enough for wheelchair navigation, equipped with grab bars, step stools, and soap and paper towels in a lowered location.
 - **Direct attendees, with clear signage, to an accessible restroom at a nearby, pre-identified venue** if there are none at the venue.
 - **Low-height reception desks** at check-in, box office, and concession.
 - **A quiet space** with adjustable lighting, seating, and fidget toys.
 - **Designated green space** for service animals.
- For events held in **outdoor locations**, the same considerations should be given.
 - Ensure outdoor pathways, terrain, and surfaces are **flat, slip-resistant, and free of steep slopes.**
- **Publish information on accessibility at each venue**, including navigation details, venue images, an access checklist and seating options (example: [Venue Access Guide](#) from TIFF).



Signage

- **Provide clear, large print signage** at the venue entrance and throughout with direction to the accessibility information desk, assistive device pickup areas, elevators, accessible restrooms, and accessibility pass waiting areas.
- **Add signs at the entrance to each program indicating access points available** (captions, audio description, and sign language interpretation).
- **When using sidewalk arrows for wayfinding, designate a distinct color for each venue's sidewalk arrows and print them large enough**, indicating direction to venue. Ensure the venue name is clearly visible so individuals with low vision can read them.

Staff and Volunteer Awareness and Training

- **Provide staff and volunteers with a daily briefing sheet that contains accessibility information** for each venue and film (e.g. programs available with open/closed captions, audio description, sign language interpretation, accessible seating areas).
- **Require staff to track all accessibility-related questions received** to enhance future training and improve online FAQ pages.
- **Encourage staff and volunteers to provide personalized support** for attendees by:
 - **Following up with those who requested accessibility support** during the festival.
 - Assisting with individual **scheduling and tickets**.
 - **Facilitating individual access requests** (e.g. booking sign language interpreters or reserved seating).
- **Increase venue staff and volunteer understanding of accessibility** by providing training on:
 - **Apparent and non-apparent disabilities**.
 - **Inclusive language and etiquette** (example: [Language Do's and Don'ts](#) by 1IN4).
 - **Film event accessibility best practices** (example: [Access Reframed, Reeling Film Festival Volunteer Video](#) created by Dr. Grishma Shah).
 - Event day logistics, such as:
 - **Assistive device purpose, function, and troubleshooting**.
 - **Accessible service and facility locations** (e.g. seating areas, restrooms, elevators, device pick-up desks, accessibility pass waiting areas).
 - **Brief non-festival event staff** (e.g. caterers, security guards) on accessibility practices.



Red Carpet and Press/Media

- **Ensure a step-free, flat path along the red carpet**, with flooring that is accessible to mobility devices.
 - Check that there are **no loose cables or areas that could catch wheels**.
 - **Place a volunteer** at the beginning and end of the carpet to ensure disabled talent are not obstructed or crowded by non-disabled talent and are guided down the carpet if needed.
- **Provide a designated area for disabled press and photographers** with seating.
- **Ensure the red carpet has no barricades separating talent and press**. Use a rope divider instead.
- **Have stools or raised platforms on hand** so short statured talent or press can be at the same eye level as others.
- **Include a field in press credential applications** where journalists can provide their access points.

Festival Sponsored Panels, Workshops, and Networking Events

- **Provide CART/live captions and sign language interpreters** at every festival sponsored event.
 - **During networking events, additional sign language interpreters** may be required for guests during socializing.
- **Use wireless microphones** for announcements and Q&As.
- **Have dedicated mic runners during Q&As** so disabled attendees can get their questions asked while seated.
- **Ask presenters and speakers to give a brief visual description** when introducing themselves to the audience. This can include their appearance, clothing, and any identifying features. For example: “My name is Jane Doe. I’m an Asian American woman with long black hair and black rimmed glasses.”
- At networking events, consider factors that contribute to **attendee comfort**.
 - **Keep music at a volume** that allows for comfortable conversation.
 - **Limit crowdedness** by requiring event registration.

Festival-Adjacent Events

- Encourage films hosting celebratory events **to select accessible locations**.
- **Provide a list of recommended venues** for related events.
- Provide a list of recommended **Access Coordinators and sign language interpreters**.



Social Media

- **Use Camel Case hashtags** in the post caption, (where the first letter of each word is capitalized, #LikeThisForExample) making it accessible for screen readers and cognitive understanding.
- **Maintain strong color contrast and accessible fonts** on all graphics.
- **Embed ALT text on all photos**, using each platform's built-in ALT text feature. ALT text describes what is happening in an image. It is recommended to include the ALT text description in the post's caption as well. For guidelines on writing effective image descriptions, please visit: [Image Description 101](#) by 1IN4 Coalition.
- **Add video descriptions to all video content.** Social media platforms do not offer a built-in audio description feature for videos. Descriptions in the post's caption provide another way of knowing what is happening in the video.
- **Caption all video content.** Depending on the platform, it may be possible to upload a closed caption file before posting. If that is not supported, reliable options are adding burnt-in (open) captions using third-party editing software (e.g. CapCut, Adobe Premiere Pro), or the caption tools built into the platform's editing suite.
- **Add a flash safety notice/warning** to any video that contains flashing elements before the film or content begins and repeat the message immediately before the flashing scene.
- **Read important information aloud or include it in the post's caption** if it appears as embedded content in the video (e.g. headers, on-screen text, images containing key details).
- **Post important information on the main feed rather than in Stories.** Stories on Instagram/Facebook/TikTok do not offer accessibility features. Updates that are considered important or essential are schedule changes, ticket notices, etc.

Disability Representation

- **Include more disabled people** on festival juries, programming teams, and staff.
- **Recruit more disabled volunteers.**
- **Programming:**
 - **Select films which include disabled creators and authentic disabled casting.**
 - **Provide multiple formats to submit an application.**
 - **Audit the film submission process** to identify potential access barriers preventing creators from submitting their films.
 - **Prioritize disability centered programming**, offering prime scheduling slots and locations.



- **Connect with disability organizations** to increase membership awareness of festival opportunities.
- **Refer to** the [1IN4 Authentic Disability Representation Rubric](#) and the [Ford Foundation's Road Map For Inclusion](#) with recommendations to avoid negative disability tropes, such as Super Crip, Victim, Innocent Fool and Villain.

Getting Around

- **Offer information public transportation** that services festival areas (trains, subways, buses, and streetcars) with accessible stops nearest to festival venues.
- **Offer an accessible shuttle or golf cart service** between official festival venues.
- **Partner with an accessible car service** which can provide patrons rides at a festival partner rate.
- **Allow access passes for vehicles to use VIP drop off areas.** Situate a greeter at the drop off areas.
- **Share a list of mobility equipment providers** who attendees can contact for emergency repairs or rentals.

Health and Safety

- **Publish a service animal policy** for screenings and festival events.
- **Identify a first-aid area** at each venue.
- **Build accessibility into emergency evacuation plans** and make evacuation guides available at each venue, online, and in festival materials.
- **Make an announcement that welcomes masking at events** and offer clear masks (to read lips) and non-clear masks to patrons, upon request.

Post-Festival

- **Run a post-festival feedback survey** specifically on accessibility to inform next year's planning.
- **Work with your local government and business owners** to encourage changes which will increase accessibility in your city.
- **Connect with other festivals for recommendations.**



Annex A – Background

About TIFF

TIFF General Overview

- Status: One of the world's five largest and most prestigious public film festivals.
- History: Founded in 1974 and held annually in September.
- Scale: Hosts hundreds of thousands of guests, industry professionals, and local audiences.
- 2023 Dates: September 7–17 (the 48th Festival).
- 2023 Impact: Featured over 300 films and 1,000+ screenings across seven venues.
- 2023 Format: Returned entirely to in-person events following the hybrid formats of 2020–2022.

TIFF Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility Commitments

- TIFF prioritizes respect, dignity, and fairness. Its [Mission](#) and [2022–2024 Strategic Plan](#) focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusion through key initiatives:
 - Supporting Indigenous communities.
 - Combating anti-Black and anti-Asian racism.
 - Providing land acknowledgments.

TIFF established a [Multi-Year Accessibility Plan \(2022–2026\)](#), an [online accessibility page](#) and an [Accessibility Policy \(2025\)](#) to improve access for disabled attendees. The core goals include:

- **Experience:** Providing a welcoming, inclusive, and accessible film-going experience for all audiences.
- **Barrier removal:** Eliminating physical, social, and economic barriers to participation.
- **Technology:** Equipping all cinemas with high-quality accessibility presentation devices.
- **Best practices:** Remaining continuously informed on the latest accessibility standards.

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"We believe that diverse relationships, perspectives, and lived experience make our Festival and year-round programming richer and more impactful." - TIFF

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Assessment Method

Our evaluation followed a three-phase approach:

1. We assembled a team of nine professional disabled film and screen industry experts to lead the assessment. The team represented a range of disabilities including blind/low vision, Deaf, mobility, neurodivergence, dwarfism, and limb difference, along with intersectional identities.
2. The team evaluated accessibility across TIFF 2023 and downtown Toronto hospitality venues, covering elements such as online/web, travel, buildings and facilities, film screenings, panels, workshops, and networking and socializing events, communication, hospitality and customer services, sensory environment, and health and safety.
3. We formulated actionable solutions to advance festival accessibility standards at future TIFF events and film festivals worldwide.

Annex B - Additional Resources for Accessible Events

[1IN4 Event Access Guide](#) by 1IN4 Coalition

[Film Exhibition Accessibility](#) by Film Event Accessibility Working Group (FEAW)

[Cultivating Festival Accessibility: Impact Report](#) by Access Reframed (Full Spectrums, All Senses Go, Backbones & LaGrish)

[Access Reframed, Reeling Film Festival Volunteer Video](#) by Dr. Grishma Shah

[Film Event Accessibility Scorecard](#) by FWD-Doc, Film Event Accessibility Working Group (FEAW), Film Festival Alliance, and 1IN4 Coalition

[A Toolkit for Inclusion & Accessibility: Changing the Narrative of Disability in Documentary Film](#) by FWD-Doc

[The Hollywood Disability Inclusion Toolkit](#) by Disability Belongs

[The Access Coordinator: Better business and equitable employment by creating access for disabled people in the entertainment industry](#) by 1IN4 Coalition

[Road Map for Inclusion: Changing the Face of Disability in Media](#) by Ford Foundation (Judy Heumann)