

REIMAGINING ACCESS

within the performing arts

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PROLOGUE

Inclusion is not a finish line. It is not something that can be declared complete or solved once and for all. It is a practice that changes as our communities change, as new voices emerge, and as different forms of access become visible. It is also a creative resource, offering new ways to think, collaborate, design, and imagine.

1 This publication provides insight into the framework we are working with at Rosendal Theatre. It draws upon Battersea Art Centre's relaxed venue framework, which was developed in collaboration with Jess Thom and Tourette's Hero, with the additional wisdom of many arts organisations, artists, practitioners, and thinkers who have expanded our understanding of what welcoming environments can be.

For Rosendal Theatre, the relaxed framework brings a clear agenda. It asks us to pay attention to and address the many barriers people face as a result of systems that discriminate on the basis of background, disability, orientation, income and age.

In this publication, disability is understood as an interaction between people's bodies, minds, and sensory experiences and the environments, systems, and attitudes around them. A person may have an impairment or condition, but it becomes disabling when barriers limit their participation. When those barriers are reduced or removed, people can participate more fully.

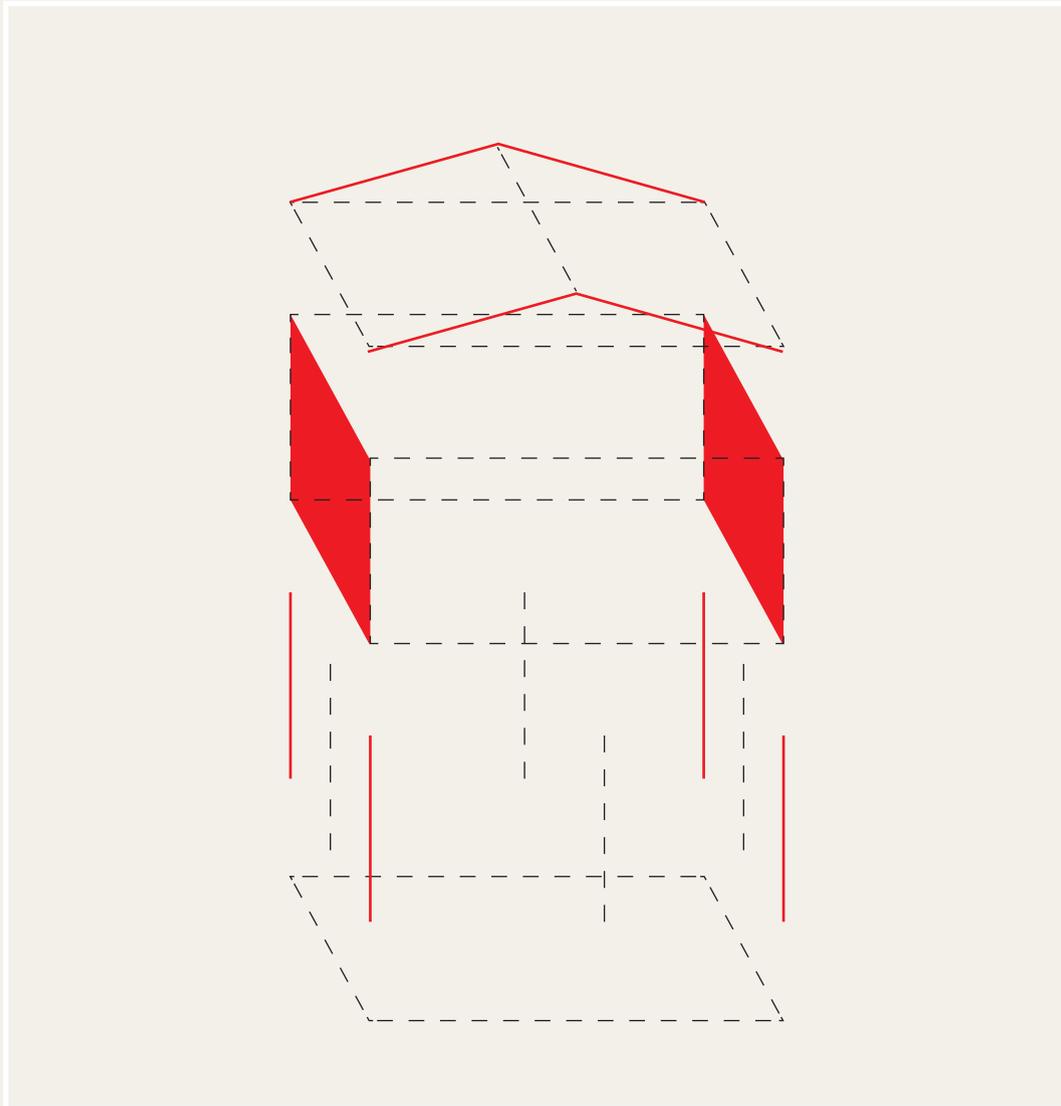
This guide is not comprehensive, nor is it something to complete. It is a way to spark reflection, start conversations, and shape decisions that support more people to participate.

Relaxed approaches remind us that access is not an add on. It is part of how we create, host, and participate. They remind us that people experience space differently, and that this diversity should be supported rather than managed away.

2 Every section of this publication describes conditions that would support more people to enter and participate with confidence. Some of these conditions are simple to introduce. Others require long term structural change. All of them rely on the willingness to listen, to adapt, and to keep learning.

If there is a single thread running through every domain, it is this: inclusion is made up of many small decisions taken every day. No single decision is enough, but together they shape environments where more people can feel welcome, confident, and at ease. By paying attention to these decisions, and by remaining open to change, we take steps toward an arts landscape that reflects the breadth and complexity of the people it aims to engage.

STRUCTURAL



Structures shape what is possible inside an organisation. Policies, workflows, leadership models, and communication cultures quietly decide who can enter, who can stay, and who can thrive. Imagining an organisation without disabling structural barriers allows us to picture what shared responsibility, clarity, and genuine inclusion might look like.

What if all disabling and discriminatory structural barriers were removed?

We will never be done, but thoughtful organisation and clear systems, from policies and staffing to workflows and communication, can help everyone feel supported, included, and able to participate fully.

STRUCTURAL

Leadership and Decision-Making

There would be ...

Leadership that includes accessibility and inclusion considerations in every decision.

Clear roles and responsibilities for ensuring accessibility across departments.

On-going reviews of policies and practices to find barriers and make improvements.

Open channels for feedback from audiences, artists, and staff about accessibility and inclusion.

Hiring and Recruitment

There would be ...

Inclusive hiring practices to ensure fair opportunities for staff and leadership.

Accessible job postings and application processes. Positions would be advertised accessibly and candidates with relevant experience would always be considered.

Support for candidates with disabilities or access needs throughout recruitment.

Transparency in selection criteria and feedback to applicants.

Boards & Governance

There would be ...

A board that is committed to inclusion and accessibility work.

Representation of diverse backgrounds and lived experiences.

An on-going review of governance to support an accessible and inclusive culture.

Staffing and Training

There would be ...

Ongoing training for all staff in inclusion, accessibility, and working with audiences and artists with diverse needs.

Clear guidance on how to support people with different needs, without assumptions.

A culture where questions about access are welcomed and acted upon.

Sufficient staffing to allow everyone to provide support when needed.

STRUCTURAL

Programming and Planning

There would be ...

Early consideration of accessibility when planning events, performances, and workshops.

Flexibility in scheduling and programming to allow for different needs and preferences.

Contingency plans in case changes are needed to make events more accessible.

Evaluation processes to learn from each event and continually improve accessibility.

Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

There would be ...

Regular auditing of structural policies, workflows, and practices.

Mechanisms to gather feedback from staff, audiences, and artists about what works and what could improve.

Clear reporting and accountability to ensure changes are implemented and maintained.

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Communication and Policies

There would be ...

Clear, accessible policies on inclusion, ticketing, and participation.

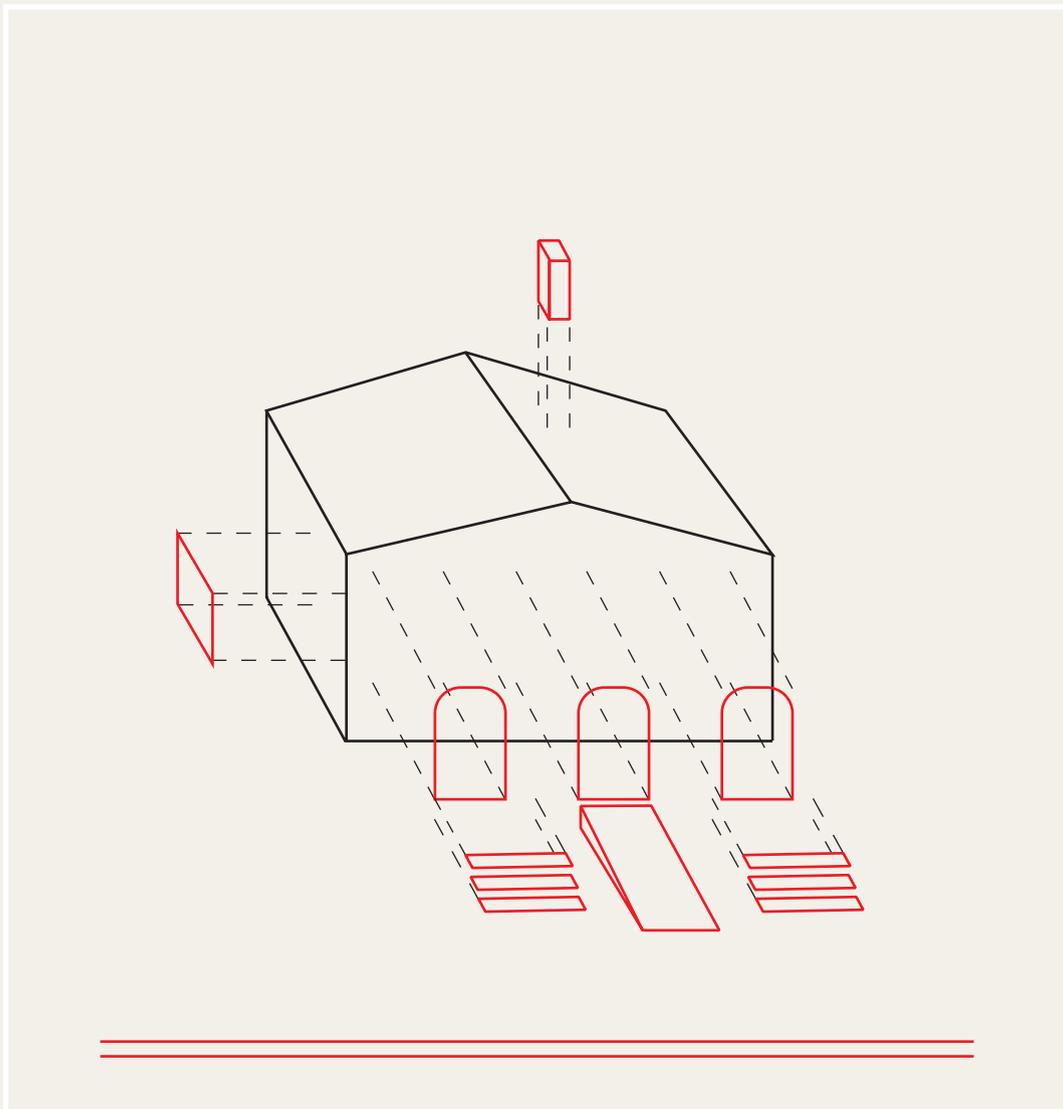
Easy ways for audiences and artists to request adjustments that improve access.

Transparent communication about what access measures are available and what limitations exist.

Simple, consistent language across all internal and external communications.

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PHYSICAL



Physical space is often the first invitation or the first barrier. Every entrance, corridor, seat, and sensory cue can either open a path or close one. Envisioning a place where the physical environment supports many different bodies and ways of moving offers a way to rethink how space can feel: calmer, clearer, more possible.

What if all disabling and discriminatory physical barriers were removed?

Not every barrier can be removed, but very many can be. Thoughtful consideration of each space, including entrances, seating areas, foyers, and backstage, can ensure many feel invited, confident, included, and at ease wherever they are.

PHYSICAL

Entrances & Arrival

There would be ...

Step-free access at every entrance, with light manual doors and automatic door openers.

Clear, high-contrast signage and wayfinding (including braille) to help everyone in the space orient themselves easily upon arrival.

Lighting that is even and not overly bright or flickering, since both glare and dimness can be disorienting.

Gentle acoustics, with echoes and background noise reduced.

Alternatives to waiting in long queues or crowded foyers, with quiet waiting options or priority entry when needed.

Ongoing Audit & Information

There would be ...

Ongoing audits of the physical environments, with clear, accessible information about which access measures are in place and which barriers remain.

Seating & Performance Spaces

There would be ...

Flexible seating options so that wheelchair users and companions can sit together, and seats can be reconfigured.

Aisles wide enough for easy movement and space for people who may need to leave during the performance.

A designated quiet or chill-out area close to the performance space.

Comfortable temperatures and ventilation throughout the venue.

PHYSICAL

Toilets & Changing Facilities

There would be ...

Fully accessible toilets with reachable sinks, soap- and paper dispensers, and handles.

Gender-neutral toilet options to ensure everyone in the space feels welcome and safe.

Accessible adult and child changing facilities, that are available to staff, artists and audiences.

Sensory Environment

There would be ...

Monitored and adjusted sound levels, so they are not overwhelming or unpredictable.

A thoughtful approach to minimising strong smells from, for example, cleaning products, smoke machines, or food.

No visual clutter; signage, screens, and decorations would be simple and calm.

Movement and Navigation

There would be ...

Wide, uncluttered corridors and doorways so that people using mobility aids can move easily.

Floor surfaces that are level, non-slip, and not overly shiny.

Clear signage to toilets, exits, and calm areas to support autonomy and orientation.

There would be a working lift that can accommodate wheelchairs or mobility equipment and is easy to locate.

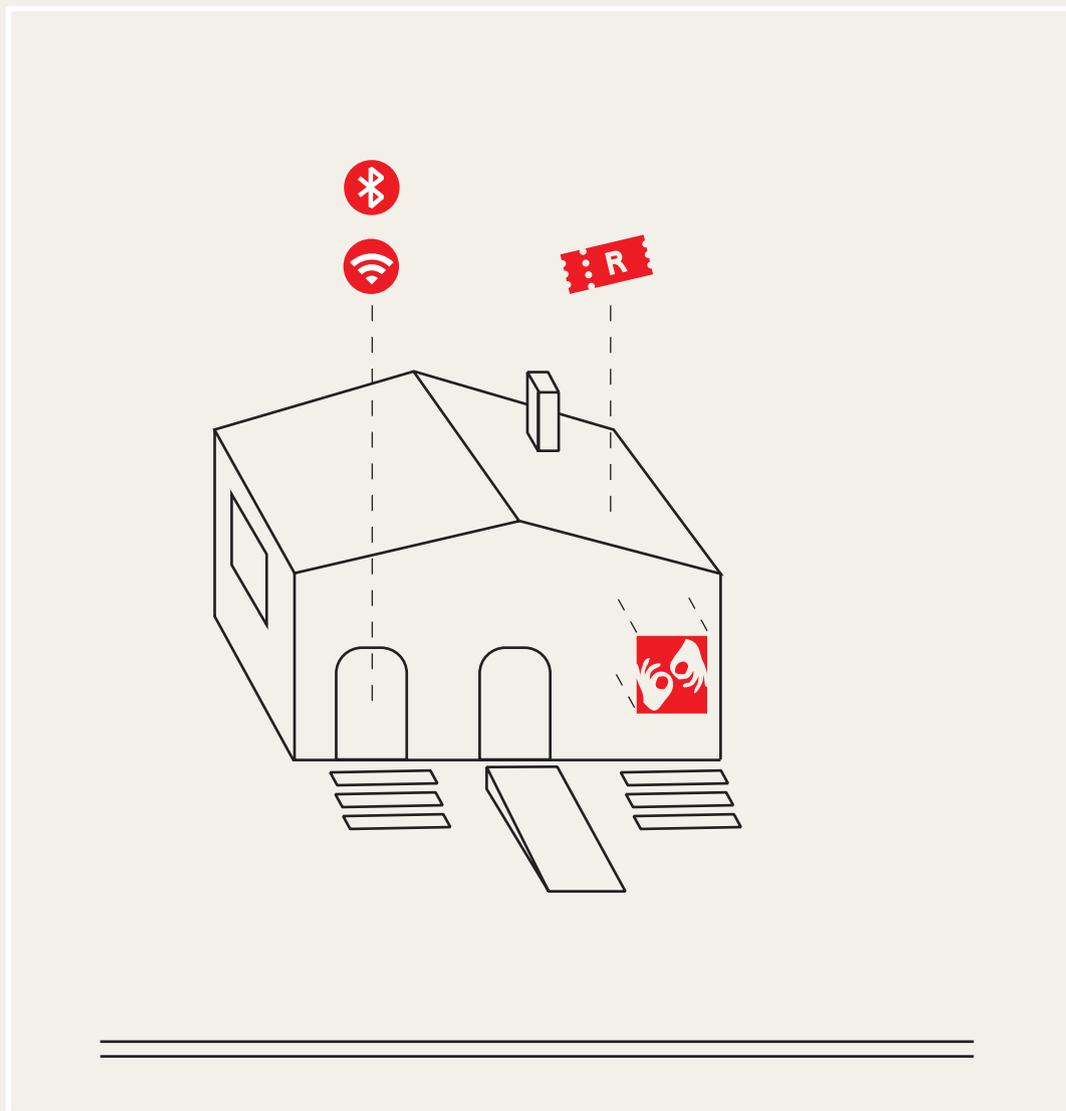
Safety & Emergency

There would be ...

Accessible evacuation routes that can be used safely by all, including wheelchair users.

Both visual and auditory alarm systems to ensure everyone in the space is alerted in case of emergency.

DIGITAL



The digital encounter often happens long before anyone arrives at a venue. A website, a booking system, or a short post can reassure, clarify, invite, or unintentionally exclude. Imagining digital and print communication that works for more people allows us to rethink how information can feel calm, trustworthy, and usable.

What if websites, social media and print were for everybody?

They may never be for everybody, but much can be done to create clarity, accessibility, and reassurance across every online, digital, and print touchpoint, every message, ticket, post, and printout, helping more people feel informed, welcomed, and confident.

DIGITAL

Websites and Online Information

There would be ...

Websites designed with accessibility in mind, compatible with screen readers, keyboard navigation, and captioning tools.

Clear language, high-contrast text, and readable fonts that reduce effort and uncertainty.

Explanations of what a relaxed event means, who it's for, and what kinds of adjustments are made.

Detailed access information, including routes, toilets, and quiet areas, easy to find and easy to trust.

Images and short videos showing what to expect when arriving and moving through the venue.

Digital and Social Media Communication

There would be ...

Pre-show information shared in accessible formats, such as plain text, large print, or audio.

Descriptions that tell people what to expect: lighting, sound, duration, and content notes.

Captions or subtitles on videos, and transcripts available for audio material.

Social media posts with alt text and clear readable layouts, so information reaches more people.

A tone that feels calm and open.

Print materials that use clear fonts, strong contrast, and generous spacing.

Easy-to-read guides and flyers in plain language.

Maps, programmes, and signage that help people orient themselves with confidence.

Large-print or alternative versions available on request, without fuss.

Design that values clarity over decoration, making the invitation visible to more people.

DIGITAL

Booking and Ticketing

There would be ...

A booking process that works for diverse needs, whether online, by phone, or in person.

Companion and carer tickets available without unnecessary forms or proof.

The option to choose seats or request specific arrangements such as aisle access, wheelchair spaces, or seats near exits.

Simple confirmation messages that tell people exactly what they need to know and what will happen next.

Privacy and Comfort

There would be ...

Respect for privacy, no unnecessary data collection or complicated forms.

Short, straightforward processes for signing up or giving feedback.

Transparency about how personal data is used and stored.

On-site Digital Interfaces

There would be ...

Digital signage and check-in systems placed at accessible heights and usable from different positions.

Calm, non-flashing screens, with simple layouts and steady pacing.

Clear visual and tactile feedback when people interact with touchscreens or information kiosks.

COMMUNITY



Inclusion is not only something that happens inside a building. It happens in relationships, networks, and collaborations. Imagining a community where people feel expected, welcomed, and valued opens possibilities for participation that extend far beyond attendance.

What if anybody and everybody got involved and felt welcomed, supported and included?

It will never be possible to fully include everyone, but thoughtful engagement, partnerships, and communication can create conditions for all kinds of people to contribute.

COMMUNITY

Artist Support and Collaboration

There would be ...

Accessible processes for artists to propose work, apply for residencies, or participate in programmes.

Tailored support for artists with access needs, including access riders paired with technical, financial, and creative resources.

Opportunities for mentorship, skill-sharing, and collaboration between artists from different backgrounds and experiences.

Community Communication

There would be ...

Regular updates and communications that are inclusive, accessible, and welcoming.

An openness to be in dialogue about how decisions are made.

Celebration of contributions and recognition of diverse voices.

Evaluation and Reflection

There would be ...

Regular review of community engagement strategies to identify what works and what could improve.

Mechanisms to gather feedback from audiences, artists, and partners.

Clear reporting and accountability to ensure community initiatives are sustained and developed.

Audience Engagement

There would be ...

Clear and open channels for audiences to provide feedback and contribute ideas.

Opportunities for audiences to participate beyond attending performances, such as workshops, discussions, or advisory roles.

Engagement strategies that reach a wide range of people, including those who won't typically attend.

COMMUNITY

Partnerships and Networks

There
would
be ...

Active collaboration with artists, communities, local organisations, support networks, and advocacy groups.

Partnerships with artists and communities with lived experience of access needs.

Mechanisms for co-creation, co-curation and consultation to ensure programming includes diverse perspectives.

EMOTIONAL



In every organisation there is also an emotional space, sometimes visible and sometimes unspoken. How a place feels affects who stays, who relaxes, who can focus, and who feels they belong. Imagining an atmosphere designed to support emotional safety helps us recognise inclusion as something lived, not only planned.

What if everyone in the space felt safe, supported, and able to enjoy themselves?

It will never be possible to fully remove stress or anxiety for everyone, but paying attention to creating an encouraging emotional environment can help all kinds of people feel more welcome, confident, and comfortable.

EMOTIONAL

Atmosphere and Wellbeing

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| There would be ... | Staff trained to respond to emotional needs and provide support where required. |
| | Quiet spaces or chill-out areas separate from busy audience areas. |
| | Clear communication and guidance to reduce uncertainty or stress. |
| | Reassurance that leaving and re-entering the space is acceptable. |
| | Support for managing overstimulation from sound, lighting, or crowd density. |

Feedback and Reflection

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| There would be ... | Channels for audiences, artists, and staff to share emotional experiences or concerns. |
| | Responsiveness to feedback, with adjustments made wherever possible to improve comfort and inclusion. |
| | Ongoing reflection and evaluation of how the emotional environment supports wellbeing for all. |

Audience, Artist, and Staff Comfort

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| There would be ... | Encouragement of positive social interactions and peer support. |
| | Flexible arrangements to accommodate individual needs and preferences. |
| | Calm, welcoming signage and cues to help everyone orient themselves and navigate the venue confidently. |
| | Consideration of breaks or decompression opportunities during longer performances or events. |
| | Reassurance that mistakes, misunderstandings, or learning moments are okay, creating a psychologically safe and non-judgmental environment for staff, artists, and audiences. |
| | Attention to workload and emotional support for staff and artists, ensuring wellbeing is prioritised alongside audience experience. |
| | |

ARTISTIC



Artistic practice is where imagination, experimentation, and care meet. It is also where inclusion can become creative, expansive, and transformative. Thinking about how artistic processes themselves might welcome more people opens a different kind of conversation, one that treats access as a language of possibility rather than limitation.

What if artistic work, processes, and aesthetics were shaped with inclusion at the centre?

We will never reach a point where every artwork is accessible to every person, and nor should artistic expression be reduced to checklists. But thoughtful artistic processes, supported experimentation, and an openness to diverse forms of experience can help create work that more people can enter, relate to, and be transformed by.

ARTISTIC

Creative Vision and Intent

There would be ...

Artistic visions that consider access and inclusion from the earliest stages of development.

Space for artists to ask: Who is this work for? Who is involved in making it? How will people with different experiences enter it?

Openness to adapting initial ideas when access considerations reveal new creative possibilities rather than limitations.

Value placed on aesthetics that welcome diverse sensory, cognitive, and emotional responses.

Processes and Collaboration

There would be ...

Rehearsal and creation processes that accommodate different working rhythms, communication styles, and access needs.

Shared vocabularies and tools that allow artists with diverse needs to contribute fully.

Collaborative agreements or access riders that outline needs and expectations clearly.

Flexibility built into timelines so that no one is excluded due to pace or process.

Forms, Aesthetics, and Experimentation

There would be ...

Permission for artists to explore accessible formats as central artistic strategies. Not as add-ons, but as integral parts of the work.

Curiosity about how captioning, audio description, tactile maps and relaxed approaches can expand artistic languages.

Recognition that accessible aesthetics can be bold and contemporary.

Experimentation with multisensory work that invites different modes of attention, focus, and perception.

Documentation and Sharing

There would be ...

Accessible documentation that allows different publics to engage with the work.

Reflection on how artistic knowledge is shared: who it reaches, who it excludes, and how it can be opened further.

Space for audiences to voice how they experienced the work and space for artists to respond, adjust, and evolve.

ARTISTIC

Performance and Audience Experience

There would be ...

Clear artistic consideration for how different audiences will experience time, intensity, sound, light, and interaction.

Honest communication about what audiences can expect, without diminishing artistic mystery or impact.

Multiple ways for audiences to enter the work – visually, aurally, socially, or physically – acknowledging that not everyone experiences the performance in the same way.

Approaches that allow for rest, re-entry, variation, or alternative modes of engagement.

There would be ...

Access budgets built into artistic projects from the start, not added later or treated as exceptional.

Tailored support to ensure artists can focus on artistic inquiry rather than battling logistical or structural barriers.

Ethics and Responsibility

There would be ...

Commitment to ensuring that how people are represented is thoughtful, collaborative, and not extractive.

Transparency about artistic choices, especially where access cannot be fully provided.

Care in how bodies, identities, and differences are portrayed, avoiding harmful stereotypes or aestheticising vulnerability.

Accountability for how artistic decisions impact audiences, participants, and collaborators.

Artist Support and Development

There would be ...

Equitable access to, for example, residencies, commissions, and development opportunities for artists with disabilities or access needs.

Mentorship and peer support structures that encourage new voices to shape the artistic field.

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ARTISTIC

Evaluation and Continuous Artistic Growth

There
would
be ...

Ongoing reflection on what artistic inclusion means for the specific context, form, and community.

Willingness to let feedback reshape future artistic decisions.

Understanding that inclusion is a creative practice, not a technical requirement – one that evolves over time with experimentation, humility, and care.

EPILOGUE

We hope that this guide gives you the impulse to engage in making the performing arts more inviting, welcoming and hospitable for everyone.

It's important to remember that there are already great tools available that allow you to implement steps straight away. This might be an online web tool that helps you design your website in accessible ways, or a plain speech guide, equally it could also be a guide for making your own access rider for artists.

Everything you develop will be specific to your capacity and context.

All the same, the main ways to take steps forward are to try things yourself, to be available for feedback from the people who face barriers and learn from those around you.

In our case, during the process of making this guide, we have taken inspiration and at times very concrete lessons from the following people and organisations:

Artsadmin

Artsadmins website: www.artsadmin.co.uk

Back to Back Theatre

Website: www.backtobacktheatre.com

Battersea Arts Centre

Website: www.backtobacktheatre.com

Bergen Internasjonale Teater

Website: www.bitteater.no

Cade & McAskill

Website: www.cadamacaskill.com

CCA Glasgow

Website: www.cca-glasgow.com

Chiara Bersani

Website: www.chiarabersani.it

Dalija Acin Thelander

Website: www.dalijaacinthelander.com

EPILOGUE

Dansens Hus Oslo

Website: www.dansenshus.com

DansiT koreografisk senter

Website: www.dansit.no

Elia Covolan

Website: www.assnefedora.com/elia-covolan

Giulia Traversi

Website: www.edf-feph.org/giulia-traversis-biography

Graeae Theatre Company

Website: www.graeae.org

Halvard Damn Laupstad

Hålogaland Teater

Website: www.halogalandteater.no

Ingerid Elise Trætteberg

Jess Thom/Touretteshero

Website: www.touretteshero.com

Kunsthall Trondheim

Website: www.kunsthalltrondheim.no

Marta Keil

Website: www.martakeil.com

New Theatre Institute of Latvia

Website: www.theatre.lv

Reykjavik Dance Festival

Website: www.reykjavikdancefestival.com

Sjiraffen Kultur- og Kompetansesenter

Website: www.sjiraffen.org

Take Me Somewhere

Website: www.takemesomewhere.co.uk

Teater Eureka

Website: www.teatereureka.no

Unlimited

Website: www.norgeunlimited.no

71BODIES

Website: www.71bodies.com

RELAXED DICTIONARY

Access Rider

An access rider means an artist, employee or anyone else decide what to share with others, how, and when, so they're not constantly re-explaining their needs. Clear access information helps others support each other better and with confidence.

Audio Description

Audio description conveys visual expressions that are otherwise perceived through sight. The describer explains what is happening on stage.

Content Warnings

Provides information about potentially sensitive content in a performance. Some content may be physically or psychologically challenging for certain individuals, and the warnings can be available via a drop-down menu on each performance page on the website.

Ear Protection

Ear protection can be used during events, either to reduce the sound experience in the auditorium or to find calm in the relaxed zone.

Fidgets

Small objects that can help with relaxation or focus – for example, a pen, an old toy, or simply something to hold in your hands.

Relaxed Performance

A performance with a lower threshold for participation, adapted for those who find the setting overwhelming or uncomfortable. Here, it is allowed to move around, make noise, come and go during the performance – and the etiquette rules are less strict.

RELAXED DICTIONARY

Relaxed Space

A dedicated room where the artists we work with, the in-house team, or audience members and guests can retreat to. A quiet space for those who need a break from social or noisy surroundings.

Sensory-Friendly Performance

In addition to the measures that apply to a relaxed performance, sound, lighting, and any special effects (such as smoke) are also adjusted so that the experience is gentler for audiences with sensory needs.

Sign Language Interpretation

A sign language interpreter conveys what is otherwise perceived through hearing. The extent of interpretation can vary – it may include all speech, song lyrics, and music, or only certain parts of the performance.

Tactile Map

Is physical information with raised lines, so that people who are blind or visually impaired can either read braille or understand the design of, for example, the set-up on the stage, the building they are in, or visual components of a performance.

Touch Tour

A guided tour before the performance, where scenography, costumes, and other key elements are presented in a tactile and descriptive way for audiences with visual impairments.

CREDITS

Written by

Alexander Roberts and Tonje Wik Olausen

Edited by

Signe Karmhus

Translated by

Signe Karmhus and Tonje Wik Olausen

Graphic Design by

Andrea Arroyo Gomez

Typeface

Inconstant Regular by Daniel Brokstad, made to be dyslexia-friendly.

This publication is supported by

BALANSEKUNST

Thank you to Aggie Dolan and Tarek Iskander (Battersea Arts Centre), Jess Thom (Touretteshero), and Dalija Acin Thelander for the valuable conversations.

