



A Guide for Museums

**Accessibility Toolkit**



**Contents**

**Overview**

04 – Introduction

05 – Getting Started Checklist

**Sample Documents**

08 – Proposal

16 – Proposed Budget

18 – Status Report

20 – Examples of Published Materials

**Templates**

22 – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis

24 – Proposed Budget Template

25 – Status Report Template

**Resources**

27 – Resources and Articles

**Overview**

**Introduction**

**In 2016, six staff members from four departments at the Freer|Sackler formed an Accessibility Taskforce to evaluate and improve access to galleries, programming, and digital offerings.   
One result of our work has been to develop documents that   
outline our process, best practices, and progress. This toolkit   
serves as a resource guide and starter set for assisting others   
with accessibility measures to use at museums and establish a taskforces of their own.   
  
This toolkit includes sample documents and templates.**

Getting Started Checklist

Taskforce Proposal

Budget Proposal

Status Reports   
Budget Tracking

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis   
Resources

This document is available online: [www.freersackler.si.edu/access-toolkit](https://www.freersackler.si.edu/access-toolkit)

Cover image: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Disability_symbols.svg>

Last Updated: May 17, 2019

**Getting Started Checklist**

1. **Form a team**
   * Call for volunteers from across the museum to participate.
     + Our team consisted of volunteers from the departments of Public and Scholarly Engagement, Exhibitions, Digital Media and Technology, and Marketing and Communications.
2. **Create a resource email account** 
   * Employ for internal communication and visitor inquiries.
     + We use [fs-accessibility@si.edu](mailto:fs-accessibility@si.edu)
3. **Create a shared file and tracking system for the team**
   * Ensure documents are stored in a common place with   
     easy access.
4. **Assess your institution’s needs and opportunities** 
   * Assess legal compliance.
   * Consider website, exhibitions, buildings, signage, etc.
   * Prioritize opportunities or action items by timeline, scope, and budget needs.
     + We used SWOT analysis template to inform our proposal   
       and budget.
5. **Talk to colleagues and do field research**
   * Reach out to community partners and establish your own user expert group. Create a contact list.
     + See resources section for ideas.
6. **Create a plan**
   * Develop a proposal based on your needs, research, and budget.
     + Our proposal and budget are included in sample documents.
7. **Develop a process to attain staff buy-in and approval**
   * Present the proposal to senior staff. This could be done individually, collectively, or both.
   * Ensure the proposal aligns with museum goals and institutional policy.
8. **Identify funding sources**
   * Consider where inexpensive solutions can be implemented within existing budgets and seek grant opportunities where available.
     + We found a series of inexpensive quick wins to enhance our offerings.
9. **Get started!**
   * Once your project is approved, do the work.
     + We used the status report to keep us organized and on track.
10. **Report out to staff, Board members, visitors, etc**
    * Share successes and challenges often and regularly at staff meetings, internal newsletters, and on your website.
      + Check out our website at: [www.freersackler.si.edu/visit/accessibility/](https://www.freersackler.si.edu/visit/accessibility/)

**Sample   
Documents**



Accessibility Proposal

January 13, 2017

A drawing of a face

Description automatically generatedA drawing of a face

Description automatically generated

**Purpose**

When the Freer|Sackler reopened in October 2017 after a major renovation of its infrastructure, we had an opportunity to become a trailblazer for general visitors and for visitors with disabilities. Accessibility is becoming a national priority for museums and organizations, such as the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and American Alliance of Museum Directors (AAMD).[[1]](#footnote-1) As a Smithsonian museum with AAM accreditation, the Freer|Sackler should strive to achieve the AAM goals of “diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion in all aspects of museum structure and programming—values vital to the future viability, relevance, and sustainability of museums.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

This document, based on research in the field, outlines a prioritized list of achievable goals to better serve all of our visitors. It includes current offerings for visitors with disabilities as well as additional opportunities if the Freer|Sackler expands its offerings.

By making the Freer|Sackler more accessible, we will serve all visitors in a manner that is more welcoming, respectful, and collaborative. We will also have a new avenue to diversify our audiences.

**Background**

Currently, the Freer|Sackler provides visitors with:

* Free loans of manual wheelchairs
* Sign-language interpretation on tours (with written advance notice) and at selected public programs
* Open captioning of exhibition videos
* Tactile elements in selected exhibitions
* FM transmitters in the auditorium
* Accessible seating in the auditorium
* Service dogs are welcome

**Proposal**

The Smithsonian Accessibility Program has stressed that all Smithsonian museums should align with the Architectural Barriers Act, the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

We proposed a strategic introduction of new amenities and programs for visitors with disabilities, including:

* Limited mobility
* Hearing loss
* Vision loss
* Cognitive disabilities/sensory processing disabilities

**Phases**

We recommend phasing in the launch of these initiatives to align with museum priorities, staff abilities, and resources available to invest in the project.

For the Freer|Sackler,

**Phase One** included amenities and programs that

* Had immediate high impact
* Appeared to require the fewest resources and the least amount of staff time
* Were likely to be implemented by October 2017

**Phase Two** included amenities and programs that

* Required more resources
* Required more staff time
* Planning could begin in 2017, but the program launch would not occur until 2018 or 2019

**Phase Three** included amenities and programs that

* Are more aspirational
* Require even more resources and staff time, possibly including the creation of new staff position(s)

**Color key in Phase One**

Green: “Low-hanging fruit.” Amenities and programs already in progress OR could be implemented with modest investment of staff and financial resources.

Red: Legal compliance. Amenities and programs that should be implemented to be in accordance with legal compliance of ADA.

Black: Desirable proposed amenities and programs for Phase One.

**Phase One**

* Limited Mobility

- Provide physically lower information desks so visitors in wheelchairs can   
 more easily interact with staff

- Design and produce a tactile/limited mobility/large print/braille map of   
 the museum that shows emergency egress

* Hearing Loss

- For exhibition videos without words, include the phrase “no narration”   
 on appropriate wall labels

- Offer ASL interpretation at one museum-wide event per year

- Add captions to all new videos produced for and shown on the   
 Freer|Sackler YouTube channel

- Make assistive listening devices available for mini-theaters in exhibitions

- Transcribe highlights podcast and audio tour and make the   
 transcriptions available at the information desks

* Vision Loss

- Ensure the website and mobile sites are compliant with low-vision   
 standards

- Include verbal descriptions for all new videos produced for and shown   
 on the Freer|Sackler YouTube channel

- Make verbal descriptions available for mini-theaters in exhibitions. This   
 could be part of a larger, verbal description podcast

- Make large print label sets for exhibition wall texts and labels available   
 at information desks (simple binders of text printouts)

- Design and produce a tactile/limited mobility/large print/braille map of   
 the museum that shows emergency egress

* Visitors in general

- Install baby-changing stations in every restroom

- Pilot and assess offering a limited number of folding stools to be   
 checked out by visitors on request

- Continue to work with SI Accessibility program to assess progress on   
 access programs

- Include an access summary on the “Plan Your Visit” webpage

* Staff and Volunteers

- Provide ongoing training to implement the items listed above

- Appoint an accessibility liaison to participate in the Accessibility Liaison   
 Council managed by the SI Accessibility Program

- Create an informal Freer|Sackler access group

**Phase Two**

* Hearing Loss

- Pilot one ASL short video that translates an audio podcast

- Pilot an ASL tour

- Expand our ASL interpretation offering for public programs

- Evaluate captions on YouTube videos and consider captioning   
 older materials

- Make portable assistive listening devices available for tours

* Vision Loss

- Evaluate verbal description pilots and consider developing more   
 verbal description throughout the museums

- Post exhibition labels online to allow individuals to use screen readers   
 in galleries

- Pilot braille museum guide or map

- Pilot a touch tour using tactile elements to help visitors experience   
 artworks

* Sensory processing disabilities or cognitive disabilities

- Participate in Morning at the Museum (for children with autism)

- Develop and post online activities from Morning at the Museum for

self- guided visits

- Pilot programs for adults with dementia or memory loss

* Visitors in general

- Continue to work with the SI Accessibility Program to assess progress   
 on access programs

* Staff and Volunteers

- Provide ongoing training to implement these items

- Develop evaluation plans to assess the projects and products created   
 for visitors

- Assess expansion of the Freer|Sackler docent and/or volunteer   
 programs to develop and support delivery of accessibility tours,   
 experiences, and programs

**Phase Three**

* Hearing Loss

- Possibly continue to create descriptive captioning for videos

- Evaluate ASL video pilot and consider developing others

- Introduce regularly scheduled ASL tours

* Vision Loss

- Offer a guiding service

- Schedule regular verbal description and tactile tours

- Pilot sessions in collections storage at which a limited number of   
 participants can handle pottery

- Introduce screen readers for in-gallery computers and adopt   
 comprehensive access using universal design for touch screens   
 in exhibitions

- Produce color-blind guides

* Sensory processing disabilities and cognitive disabilities

- Offer sensory backpacks at the information desks

- Offer ear defenders at the information desks

- Pilot regular programs for children with sensory processing disabilities   
 or cognitive disabilities

- Pilot regular programs for adults with cognitive disabilities

* Visitors in general

- Continue to work with SI Accessibility Program to assess progress on   
 access programs

- Include tactile enhancements (e.g., 3-D printed objects) in certain   
 galleries

- Offer a hands-on desk in certain galleries

* Staff

- Ongoing training to implement these items

- Implement evaluation plans to assess the projects and products   
 developed for visitors

- Pilot specialized docent/volunteer accessibility cohort

**Accessibility Proposal Estimated Budget**

**One-time Costs**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Item** | **Low Estimate** | **High Estimate** |
| Hearing loss | Existing YouTube video captions (number of videos, number of hours) | Total cost; contractor (cost/minute) | Total cost; contractor (cost/minute) |
| Vision loss | Website compliance | Total cost; staff time | Total cost; contractor (cost/year plus cost for focus group) |
| Vision loss | Existing YouTube verbal descriptions (numbers of videos, number of hours) | Total cost; contractor (cost/hour) | Total cost; contractor (cost/hour) |
| Vision loss | Mini-theaters with verbal descriptions | Total cost; contractor (cost/video) | Total cost; contractor  (cost/video) |
| Vision loss | Existing PDF verbal descriptions | Total cost; contractor  (number of PDFs) | Total cost; contractor  (number of PDFs) |
| Visitors in general | Baby changing stations | Total cost; OFMR work | N/A |
| Visitors in general | Access summary on website | Total cost; number of staff hours | Total cost; number of staff hours |
|  | **TOTAL** | ***Cost*** | **Cost** |

**Ongoing Costs**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Item** | **Low Estimate** | **High Estimate** |
| Hearing loss | “No narration” labels | Total cost; staff time | Total cost; staff time |
| Hearing loss | New YouTube video captions (number of hours/year on average) | Total cost/year; contractor (cost/hour) | Total cost/year; contractor (cost/hour) |
| Hearing loss | Assistive listening for mini-theaters | Total cost; staff time | TBD equipment cost |
| Vision loss | Website compliance | Total cost; staff time  (number of hours/year) | Total cost; staff time  (number of hours/year) |
| Vision loss | New YouTube verbal descriptions (number of hours/year on average) | Total cost; contractor (cost/hour) | Total cost; contractor (cost/hour) |
| Vision loss | Large print labels | Total cost; staff time (cost/exhibition, number of galleries) | Total cost; staff time (cost/exhibition, number of galleries) |
| Vision loss | PDF verbal description creation and training | Total cost; staff time | Cost/PDF; staff time |
| Visitors in general | Stools for checkout | Total cost; staff time | Cost per stool; staff time (Replace number/year) |
| Visitors in general | SI Access assessment/training | Total cost; staff time | Total cost; staff time |
| Visitors in general | SI Accessibility liaison | Total cost; staff time | Total cost; staff time |
| Visitors in general | F|S Access group | Total cost; staff time | Total cost; staff time |
|  | **TOTAL** | **Cost** | **Cost** |

**Already Implemented**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Item** | **Cost** |
| Limited mobility | Accessible interior map, tactile and braille | Total cost |
| Vision loss | Large print labels | Total cost; staff time |
| Visitors in general | F|S Access group trip to AAM (number of staff) | Total cost |
|  | ***TOTAL*** | **Cost** |

**VAT Accessibility Taskforce: Status Report**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Project Title:** Next steps for VAT Accessibility Taskforce | | | | | |
| **Project Manager:** VAT Accessibility Taskforce | | | **Last Updated:** 11/17/17 | | |
|  | | | | | |
| **Status Report** | | | | | |
| **Task** | **Task Owner** | **Task Status** | | **Completion Rate** | **Proposed Date of Completion** |
| Access offerings on F|S webpage | Group | Complete | | 100% | 10/16/17 |
| Mini- written description and label about the ambient noise | RK | Complete | | 100% | 10/16/17 |
| Tactile map | BR | Complete | | 100% | 10/16/17 |
| Large print labels throughout museum galleries | ML | Complete | | 100% | 11/1/17 |
| Large print labels in selected exhibition (Buddhism) | ML | Complete | | 100% | 11/1/17 |
| Blog post about work | Group | Not started | | 0% | 2/1/18 |
| Large print labels in selected exhibition (ancient Chinese bells) | KT and BR | In progress | | 90% | 1/1/18 |
| Morning at the Museum | KT and ML | In progress; date for Freer | | 10%; ML got area funds and will have funding | Freer date is April 7 |
| Social story for the Freer | AG | In progress | | 10% | 4/7/18 |
| See Me at Freer|Sackler | BR | In progress | | 10% | 6/1/18 |
| Social story for the Sackler | AG | Not started | | 0% | 11/1/18 |
| Visitor map | BR | In progress | | 80%; edit to include short flight of steps in Freer 1. Next map reprint to include this flight of steps. Map on website under “Find your way” | 1/30/18 |
| Wheelchair route | BR | In progress | | 70%; needs to be user tested | 1/30/18 |
| ASL interpretation and assistive listening for Nowruz | KT and CUR | In progress | | 0%. KT to follow up | 3/11/18 |
| ASL interpretation and assistive listening for Lunar New Year events | ML | Not started | | 0% |  |
| App added to the accessibility page | RK | Not started | | 0% | 2/28/18 |

**Published Materials**

View and download examples: [www.freersackler.si.edu/access-toolkit](http://www.freersackler.si.edu/access-toolkit)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **A picture containing animal  Description automatically generatedLarge print labels** | **A screenshot of a cell phone  Description automatically generatedVideo transcripts** | **A picture containing wall, indoor  Description automatically generatedAudio app transcripts** |
| **A screenshot of a computer  Description automatically generatedVisual floor plan** | **A screenshot of a cell phone  Description automatically generatedText directions** | **A close up of a device  Description automatically generatedTactile map** |

**Templates**

**Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis**

**Key Strengths**

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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**Key Weaknesses**

1. *\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*
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**Key Opportunities**

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**Key Threats**

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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**Which actions do we need to take now to ensure our future success?**

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**Estimated Budget Template for Accessibility Proposal**

**One-time Costs**

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| **Category** | **Item** | **Low Estimate** | **High Estimate** |
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|  | **TOTAL** | **Cost** | **Cost** |

**Ongoing Costs**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Item** | **Low Estimate** | **High Estimate** |
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|  |  |  |  |
|  | **TOTAL** | **Cost** | **Cost** |

**Already Implemented**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Item** | **Cost** |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  | **TOTAL** | **Cost** |

**Accessibility Taskforce: Status Report**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Project Title:** | | | | | | |
| **Project Manager:** | | | **Last Updated:** | | | |
|  | | | | | | |
| **Status Report** | | | | | | |
| **Task** | **Task Owner** | **Task Status** | | **Completion Rate** | **Proposed Date of Completion** |
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**Resources**

**Resources and Articles**

**General**

Smithsonian Accessibility Program

<https://www.si.edu/Accessibility>

Smithsonian Cooper Hewitt Design Access

https://www.cooperhewitt.org/design-access/

Kennedy Center Accessibility Program

<http://www.kennedy-center.org/pages/accessibility/>

Canadian Museum for Human Rights Accessibility Program

<https://humanrights.ca/visit/accessibility>

Institute of Museum and Library Services Accessibility Resources

https://www.imls.gov/issues/national-issues-priorities/accessibility-resources-museums-and-libraries

Museum of Science Universal Design for Museum Learning Experiences

https://www.mos.org/UniversalDesign

**Large Print Labels**

American Council of the Blind: Guidelines for Large Print Documents

<http://www.acb.org/large-print-guidelines>

Freer|Sackler large print label examples

<https://www.freersackler.si.edu/visit/accessibility#large-print>

**Verbal Descriptions**

Art Beyond Sight (learning tool)

http://www.artbeyondsight.org/handbook/acs-verbal.shtml

Coyote (open-source long-form annotation and description platform)

<https://coyote-team.github.io/coyote/>

Cooper Hewitt (exhibition)

<https://www.cooperhewitt.org/2018/04/11/cooper-hewitt-takes-on-verbal-description/>

Guggenheim (example)

<https://www.guggenheim.org/audio/playlist/verbal-descriptions-for-giacometti>

Rubin Museum (verbal description and sensory tours with in-person tour example)

<http://rubinmuseum.org/events/series/verbal-description-and-sensory-tours>

**Programming**

Smithsonian Morning at the Museum (family programs for visitors with cognitive and sensory processing disabilities)

<https://www.si.edu/Accessibility/MATM>

# See Me at Smithsonian (a program for adults with ementia and their care-partners)

<https://africa.si.edu/?s=see+me> (example at National Museum of African Art)

Smithsonian American Art Museum (gallery talks in ASL)

https://americanart.si.edu/education/adult/asl

Washington State Arts Commission (ArtsWA) (planning accessible meetings and events)

https://www.arts.wa.gov/media/dynamic/docs/Planning%20Accessible%20Events.pdf

**Testing / Evaluation**

Washington State Arts Commission (ArtsWA) – Evaluation Guide

https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Step6.pdf

**Design Accessibility (Website, Exhibitions, Graphics, etc.)**

Downloadable Disability Access Symbols

https://graphicartistsguild.org/downloadable-disability-access-symbols/

Smithsonian Exhibition Design Guidelines

<https://www.si.edu/Accessibility/SGAED>

Smithsonian Publication Design Guidelines

<https://www.si.edu/Content/Accessibility/Publication-Guidelines.pdf>

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) – Design for Accessibility: A Cultural Administrator's Handbook

https://www.arts.gov/publications/design-accessibility-cultural-administrators-handbook

Website Accessibility Checker and Validator

<https://www.powermapper.com/products/sortsite/checks/accessibility-checks/>

WCAG 2.0 Checklist

<https://webaim.org/standards/wcag/checklist>

The A11Y Project Checklist - A Beginner’s Guide to Web Accessibility

<https://a11yproject.com/checklist>

Contrast Checker

[https://contrastchecker.com](https://contrastchecker.com/)

Accessible Color Palette Builder

<https://toolness.github.io/accessible-color-matrix/>

Color Blindness Simulator

<http://www.color-blindness.com/coblis-color-blindness-simulator/>

Theme Design and Development Tools:

<https://make.wordpress.org/accessibility/handbook/which-tools-can-i-use/useful-tools/>

Hardware and Tools

Aira

<https://aira.io>

iPhone/iOS

<https://www.apple.com/accessibility/iphone/>

Android

https://support.google.com/accessibility/android/answer/6006564

Legal Compliance

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) - Regulations

https://www.ada.gov/2010\_regs.htm

ADA National Network

https://adata.org/

ADA Standards for Accessible Design

<https://www.ada.gov/2010ADAstandards_index.htm>

Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) – Accessibility Standards

<https://www.access-board.gov/guidelines-and-standards/buildings-and-sites/about-the-aba-standards/aba-standards>

**Articles and Additional Reading**

A New Way to See: Looking at Museums through the Eyes of the Blind

https://www.aam-us.org/2019/01/28/a-new-way-to-see-looking-at-museums-through-the-eyes-of-the-blind/

Beyond Accessibility to Universal Design

https://www.wbdg.org/design-objectives/accessible/beyond-accessibility-universal-design

Embracing Inclusive Design in Multitouch Exhibit Development

https://ideum.com/spec-sheets/Embracing-Inclusive-Design.pdf

Welcoming All Visitors: Museums, Accessibility, and Visitors with Disabilities

http://ummsp.rackham.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Braden-working-paper-FINAL-pdf.pdf

**Feedback**

**Please email fs-accessibility@si.edu**

**Download**

[**www.freersackler.si.edu/access-toolkit**](https://www.freersackler.si.edu/access-toolkit)

1. # The American Alliance of Museums hosted a webinar on this and related issues in August 2016. See “Discussing Identity, Bias, Privilege and Diversity in the Museum Field,” <http://www.aam-us.org/resources/online-programs/edcom-google-hangouts/discussing-identity-bias-privilege-and-diversity-in-the-museum-field> (accessed December 21, 2016). In 2016 the AAMD compiled a report on how museums are addressing access. See Association of Art Museum Directors, Next Practices: Diversity and Inclusion (2016), <https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/050916-AAMDNextPracticesDiv-Incl.pdf> (accessed December 21, 2016).

   [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See the American Alliance of Museums 2016–2020 Strategic Plan, <http://aam-us.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/english.pdf?sfvrsn=0>; American Alliance of Museums Resources on Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion, <http://www.aam-us.org/about-us/what-we-do/resources-on-diversity-equity-accessibility-inclusion/?utm_source=aam.us-org&utm_medium=1B>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)