*The following are notes taken by Mass Cultural staff in 2017*

The Accessible Performance Pipeline

2017 convenings of creative practitioners with disabilities

*Theater is the art of storytelling and production development is a profession; theatrical production becomes the labor of artists, writers, musicians, performers, technicians, designers, directors, and volunteers, and is a business that contributes to a vibrant creative economy. Theater as a practice enhances learning, health, and social skills. The research reveals these inherent benefits. But how do we act on this promise? Who takes stage?*

*What are the barriers to full participation? To access the multiple skills learned in performance and production work, how do we intentionally anticipate and reasonably accommodate across physical, communication, and social differences? What are the pathways for emerging artists? Where are the apprenticeships? Do the colleges and universities have the infrastructure, the spaces, and the human resources to support recruitment and accommodation of students with disabilities?*

The Accessible Performance Pipeline was a convening for art and disability advocates to ready a Call to Action to be presented at the StageSource Theatre Conference.

The conversation with local artists, activists, and educators included [Keith Jones](http://kriphopnation.com/), [Elizabeth Keefe](https://www.lesley.edu/.../faculty-staff.../elizabeth-keefe), [Heather Watkins](https://slowwalkersseemore.wordpress.com/), [Elbert Joseph](https://wheenews.blogspot.com/2015/02/an-interview-with-elbert-joseph-tuc.html?fbclid=IwAR1CpsT-OjgaCPhi5Ra7P4NRe6fz462HE60QkaU7ZAIrae-6sJM2DbTZ3bM), and [Kerry Thompson](http://www.silentrhythmsboston.org/) and was moderated by Howard Sherman, director of the Arts Integrity Initiative at the New School for Drama, New York City.

**Artistic Decisions**

1. Representation of disabled artists on creative teams Bring artists with disabilities into companies. And Casting. What about authentic casting? Is there a fiscal barrier? Why are Deaf actors only seen in Deaf roles? How can we change perceptions on casting?
2. Companies should share resources and training modules. Can we facilitate setting up an online platform (no ads, no promotion) that just shares resources?
3. For companies wanting to do more work in new communities, important to identify and work with the bridge builders in that community. These bridge builders should have capacity to teach AND have the cultural capital to develop trust with the community. Center nothing about me, without me.
4. Consider designing audio description and ASL interpretation in a way that is integrated into the design of the production

**Training and Education**

1. Offer trainings on a larger scale to bring together larger community – beyond “preaching to the choir. How do we get the non-converted to participate?
2. We need more funding for staff development in pedagogy of disability – not just in the accommodations.
3. Are there online platforms for cultural training? There should be!
4. There should be basic requirements that cultural institutions have an understanding of people with disabilities, perhaps a certificate program?

**Leadership and Activism**

To be a leader in this movement is to be an activist.

1. Training and education cannot be a single class, it’s a process and should be ongoing.
2. Be mindful of people with cognitive and developmental disabilities– they are often forgotten.
3. The power of storytelling. Share your stories! Remember, with us not for us.
4. The need to be resourceful. The need to be a deliberate. The need to be innovative.
5. Funding. Where is it? How do strategic partnerships help?
6. Help younger people find their voice – educate youth in accessible arts programs
7. Understand access beyond architecture and inclusion as a unified vision– develop a true sense of belonging…..
8. Make room at the table, not an advisory board but a board member, not just the audience but also the artist, the staff member, the volunteer
9. 100% of spaces need to be ada accessible (stage, house, green room, orchestra pit, office, the after party) Build in accessibility measures to public events of all kinds not just the flagship paid performances but readings job fairs end of season party fundraising concerts

**Call to Action**

* Can the schools, conservatories, and universities of the Commonwealth respond to the data that indicates young artists with disabilities need accessible environments, mentor cultivation, leadership development, and professional representation?
* Can the Commonwealth play an integral role in developing accessible performance pipelines that facilitate changes in practice at high schools, community centers, youth groups, and performance venues?
* As the skilled student pool increases, are employers in film, television, news, advertising, theater, and interactive media ready?