

PART II

TOWARDS A CULTURE OF ACCESS

FINDINGS FROM THE
MASSACHUSETTS ARTS & CULTURE SURVEY
OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

2024



An Affiliate of Seven Hills Foundation

In Partnership with





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Open Door Arts (formerly VSA Massachusetts), an affiliate of Seven Hills Foundation, increases access, participation, and representation of people with disabilities in the arts. We believe our shared cultural community is strengthened when it represents, includes, and engages all people. We work with students, teaching artists, educators, and leaders of cultural organizations through innovative and inclusive programming, training, events, and exhibits designed to improve access, expand participation, challenge the status quo, and share practices to ensure equitable representation by people with disabilities in the arts. www.OpenDoorArtsMA.org

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This report, including a screen reader friendly version, can be accessed by visiting: OpenDoorArtsMA.org/TCAReport22

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Context

1 in 4 adults, and nearly 1 in 2 adults ages 65+, have a disability in the U.S. (CDC, 2018). As of 2019, 11.5% of the Massachusetts population identifies as having a disability (Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, 2021). People with disabilities are critical members of our communities as patrons, employees, artists, and community members that are too often left out of the arts and culture sector. This report shares their direct input to inform and move forward efforts to improve the accessibility, equity, and inclusivity of the arts and culture sector in Massachusetts and beyond.

This report is written as a companion to Open Door Arts' 2022 report *Towards a Culture of Access: Findings for the Massachusetts Arts & Culture Survey*. In order to appreciate the full context of this report, it is recommended to first read *Towards a Culture of Access (2022)*. The report can be accessed at opendoorartsma.org/tcareport22/

Towards a Culture of Access (2022) was published in partnership with Mass Cultural Council with the goal of better understanding the state of accessibility in the arts and culture sector in Massachusetts and to better understand what can help the sector move forward. Through this survey and report, we learned more about how arts and culture organizations in Massachusetts are thinking about access, and how that work is being actualized through policies, practices, programs, relationships, and organizational culture.

Towards a Culture of Access (2022) has impacted the field in numerous ways, from motivating individual action in organizations and informing sector-wide projects, to inspiring the proposal of the Accessibility in the Creative Economy Act (ACE Act), which, if passed, will create a dedicated state source of funding to support accessibility in arts and culture organizations throughout Massachusetts.

We intentionally chose to center organizations in the research represented in *Towards a Culture of Access (2022)* because of the power they hold in determining who has access to their spaces, content, and opportunities, and to hold them accountable in recognizing the responsibility they have to mitigate the harm and exclusion experienced by people with disabilities.

Context

However, we knew since the initial planning phases of *Towards a Culture of Access (2022)* that, to create a complete understanding of access in the arts and culture sector, the voices and perspectives of patrons, artists, and cultural workers with disabilities needed to be prioritized. This report, *Part II: Towards a Culture of Access (2024)* centers the experience of the disability community and helps to support, inform, and also challenge the data collected from organizations in the 2022 report.

Our goal to collect data that centers the voices of people with disabilities aligned with our work in FY24 supporting Mass Cultural Council in the research and recommendations leading to the creation of their Disability Equity Plan. As part of this collaboration we collected feedback from over 600 members of our cultural community. This report contains analysis of data from a 23-question survey entitled “Feedback from Patrons, Artists And Cultural Workers With Disabilities, And Caregivers Of People With Disabilities,” designed in collaboration with a hired group of advisors who brought professional and lived experience with disability to inform the process. The survey had 254 responses, and all respondents received a gift card in gratitude for their input.

For the purposes of this report, we are only sharing questions that are widely-relevant to the field. Questions 12, 13, 16, and 17 are not included as those questions were asked to gather information specifically relevant to Mass Cultural Council, and the results have been shared with them directly.

Like *Towards a Culture of Access (2022)*, this report shares critical analysis along with the survey questions and response summaries with the goal of providing insights to move the sector forward. This report shares the perspective of individuals with disabilities and their caregivers, family members, and/or service providers, and deepens the conversation started by the 2022 report. Because it is the responsibility of organizations to ensure people with disabilities can fully and equitably engage—whether as patrons, employees, artists, or community members—we continue to address organizations in this report. Through this research, data, and recommendations, we aim for organizations to hear from the disability community and center this critically important perspective as they move forward with access work.

Our team can be reached at admin@OpenDoorArtsMA.org and will gladly share additional data and results, and provide information in an alternative format upon request.

Acknowledgements

The Open Door Arts team is grateful to all the people who came together to make this report possible.

First, we're grateful to Mass Cultural Council for partnering with us to conduct this research, the agency's Disability Task Force for their consistent support throughout the process, and the communications team at the agency for distributing the survey widely. We also thank our colleagues in the field who shared the survey with their communities.

We also extend our gratitude to the team at Art-Reach, who also supported the Mass Cultural Council's Disability Equity Plan. We especially thank Dani Rose, Adrienne Beckham, and John Orr for their partnership, collaboration, and insight. In addition, their town hall forum, which facilitated important conversation around access in arts and culture with the disability community, provided valuable additional context for the analysis and key takeaways presented in this report.

We are deeply grateful to our Arts Access Advisors Gordon Sasaki, Amber Percy, Ali Rheaume, Laura Sanchez Garcia, and Christopher Robinson, who were hired to ensure multiple voices and perspectives informed this process, from survey design to data analysis. Their insights and expertise ensured that this work was done authentically and with the required nuance.

We worked with additional advisors Marcela Bastida, Leslie Condon, Katherine Gilliland, Alicia Greene, Stewart Ikeda, Karen Krolak, and Nora Nagle who also supported our work. We are grateful for their support and contributions that informed the broader work in which this survey is situated. We also thank Hannah Goodwin of the Open Door Arts team for her support, insights, and expertise throughout this process. We greatly appreciate Amber Percy for reviewing the screen reader-friendly version of this report for accessibility.

Lastly, we are incredibly grateful to all the individuals who took this survey. Thank you for trusting us with your feedback, and for trusting that we would share it back to our creative sector with care and authenticity. You are valued members of our community who are integral to the arts & culture sector in Massachusetts. Just as we said in *Towards a Culture of Access (2022)*, we hope this report serves as a call to action for organizations to hold themselves and each other accountable to do better by you.

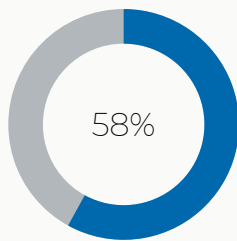
Respondents

We received 254 survey responses from individuals across Massachusetts

Respondents identified as the following:



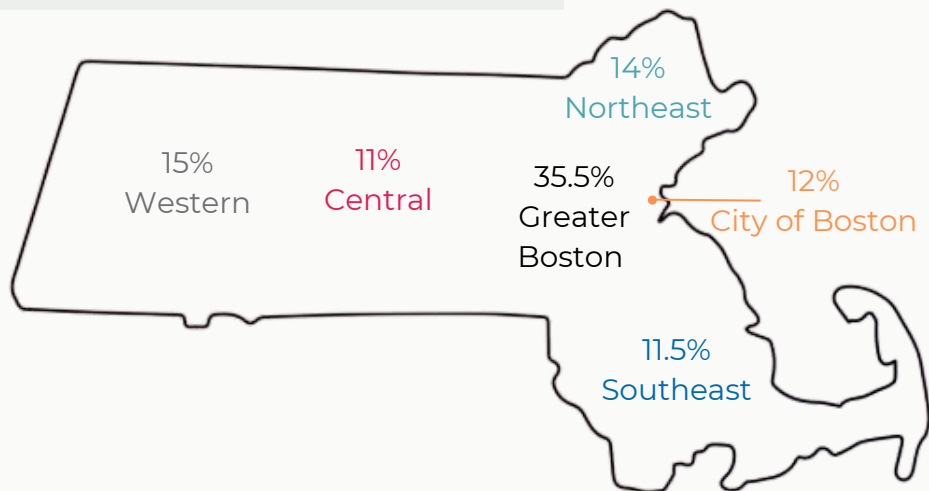
11% selected both “A person with a disability/disabled” and “A caregiver, family member, or service provider of a person or people with disabilities”



58% also identify as an artist or cultural worker with a disability who works or collaborates with arts and cultural organizations in MA

Respondents were from each part of the state, with the majority being from Greater Boston Area*

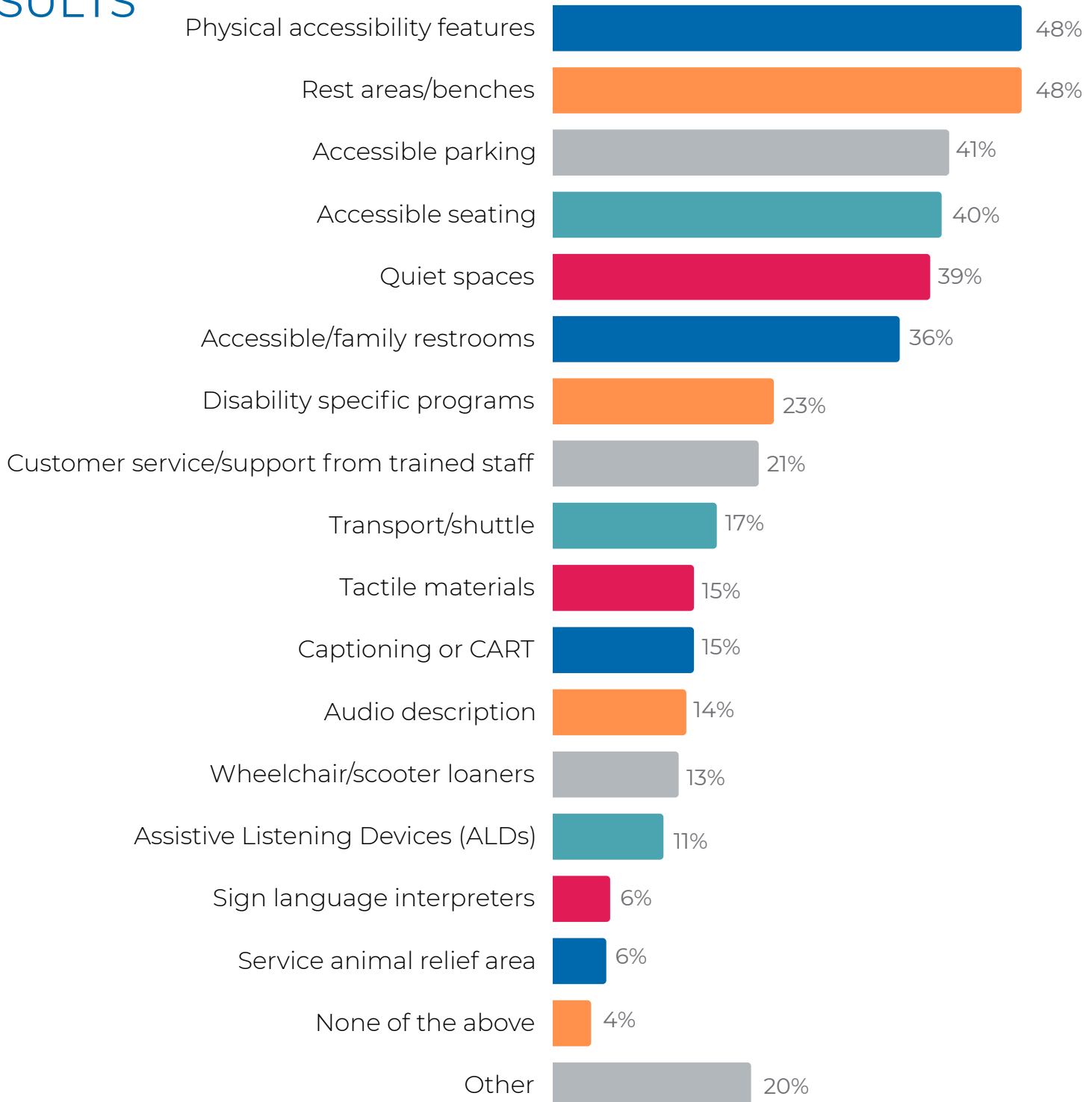
*1% of respondents currently live out of state



Survey Content & Results

Q3 Which accessible services and features do you (or the person/people you care for) need from arts and cultural organizations when visiting? (Please check all that apply)

RESULTS



Survey Content & Results

Q3
Cont.

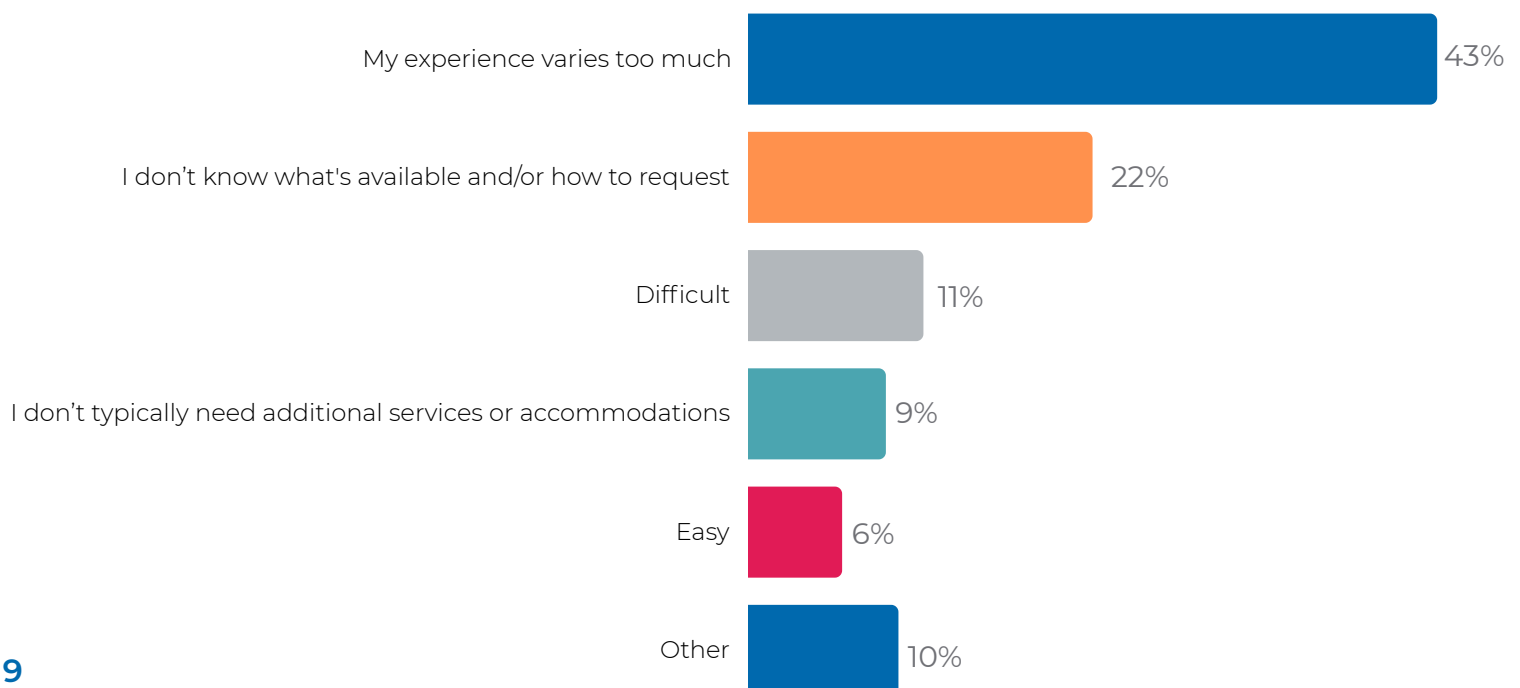
The Five Most Chosen

- 48% Physical accessibility features
- 48% Rest areas/benches
- 41% Accessible parking
- 40% Accessible seating
- 39% Quiet spaces

ANALYSIS

It is significant that every service/feature was selected, and that no service or feature was chosen a majority (over 50%) of the time. This can be interpreted to be representative of the breadth and variety of individual experiences. It is worth highlighting that among the most chosen are services/features such as “Rest areas/benches” and “Quiet spaces” which may be more readily achievable for organizations to implement. Further demonstrating the nuance of individual needs, there were 52 write-in responses for “other” which shared specific access requests such as mask policies, trained staff, alternative hours, large-print, and more. Notably among these, 17 included access requests about masking and COVID-19 policies. These requests included both wishes for increased and decreased restrictions related to COVID-19, again demonstrating the need to offer a range of options for engaging with an organization in order to meet different needs.

Q4 Generally, how easy is the process for you to request accessibility services and accommodations at arts and cultural organizations?



Survey Content & Results

Q4 Cont.

"In my experience, it has been easy to make specific requests but VERY time consuming to do so."

"I often don't request accommodations because the effort required to assess how to request them, as well as to identify and explain the supports that would assist me, which may not be obvious to others, is usually too much. So instead I do my best to create my own accommodations. That also means I don't have to deal with questions, disbelief, and/or judgment."

ANALYSIS

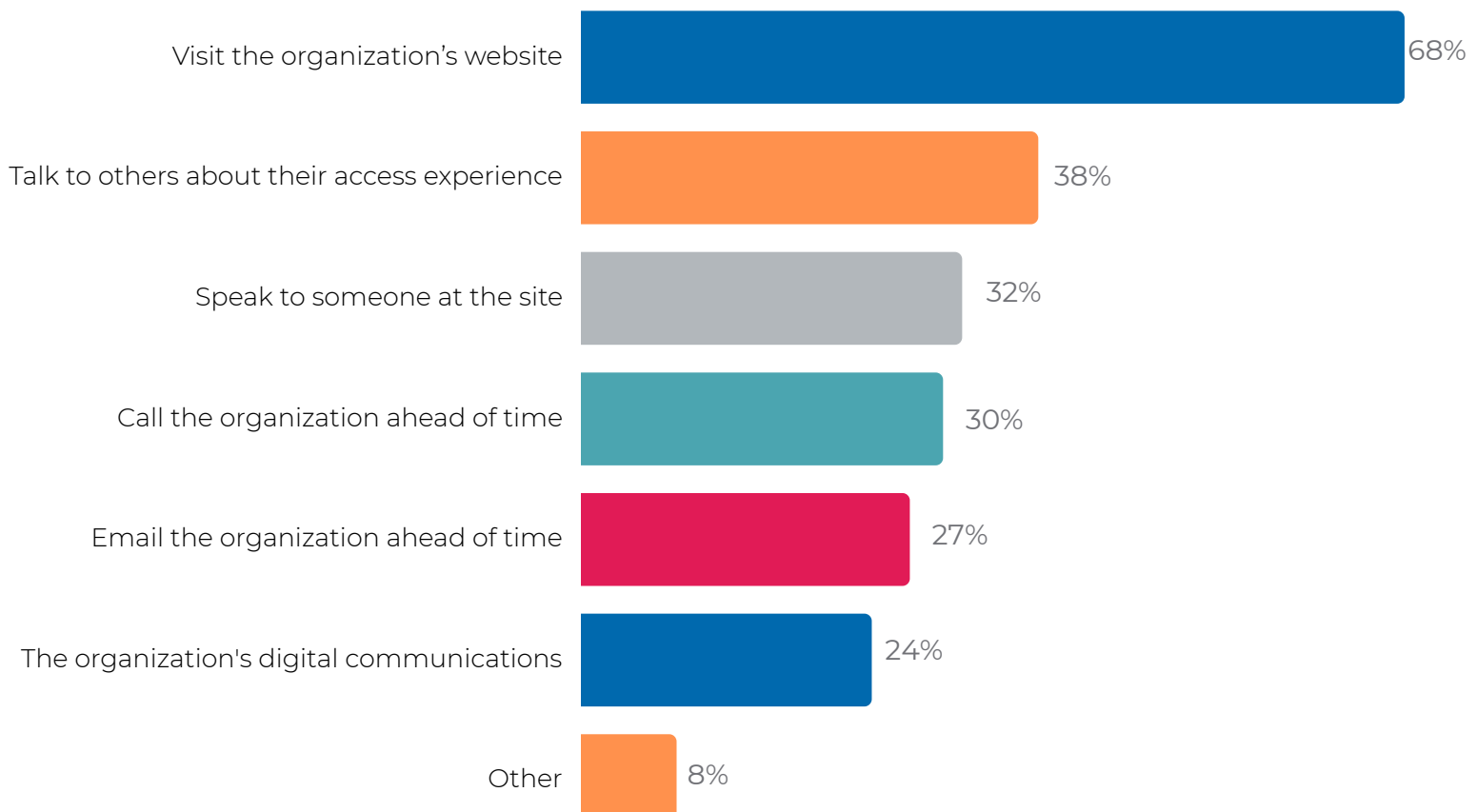
The prominence of "My experience varies too much across organizations to generalize" indicates that there is too much inconsistency in the way arts and culture organizations receive and respond to requests from people with disabilities. Having undependable access services causes fatigue and hardship which can result in harm and uncertainty as illustrated in the two shared quotations. When this happens, individuals have to assess if it is worth the risk and burden to engage with arts and culture organizations. This inability to depend on access is underscored by "Easy" being the least chosen at 6%. As we will discuss in the Call to Action, this data supports the need for a common set of best practices to create some consistency, including making information easy to find. Easily accessible information can improve the experience of the 22% who selected "I don't know what services and accommodations are available and/or how to request them."

Survey Content & Results

Q5

How do you typically learn about an arts and cultural organization's accessibility services and features? (check all that apply)

RESULTS



"It is very rare that an [organization] has adequate accessibility info on their websites. [It] almost always requires the time of contacting them through phone calls and emails. Often don't receive answers."

Survey Content & Results

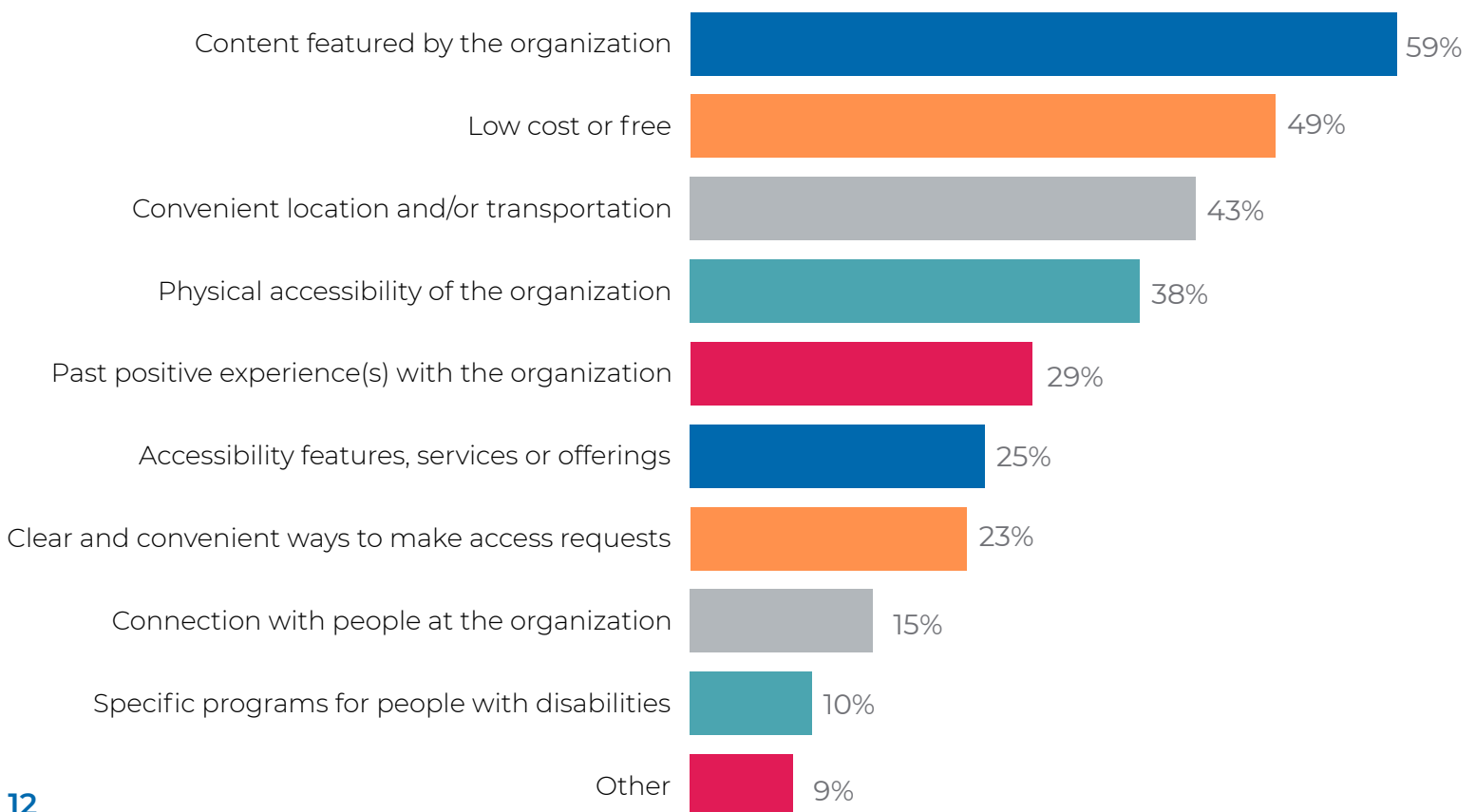
ANALYSIS

Q5 Cont.

The majority of respondents selected “Visit the organization’s website,” signaling the critical role websites play and their need to be accessible, consistently updated, and have accessibility information easy to find. The second most chosen answer choice, “Talk to other people about their access experience at the site,” speaks to the power of reputation and word-of-mouth. This also highlights the importance of the human experience in access. Physical supports can be in place, but if someone has a bad experience, then that will affect their future engagement and recommendations to others. Human-to-human connection is highlighted in the next three most chosen, which all include interacting with someone at the organization. This underscores the importance of customer service and staff training. These two points combined show the need for both physical systems and human-centered interactions that acknowledge that many access requests require nuance.

Q6 **What are the three most influential factors in your decision to visit an arts and cultural organization? (choose 3)**

RESULTS



Survey

Content & Results

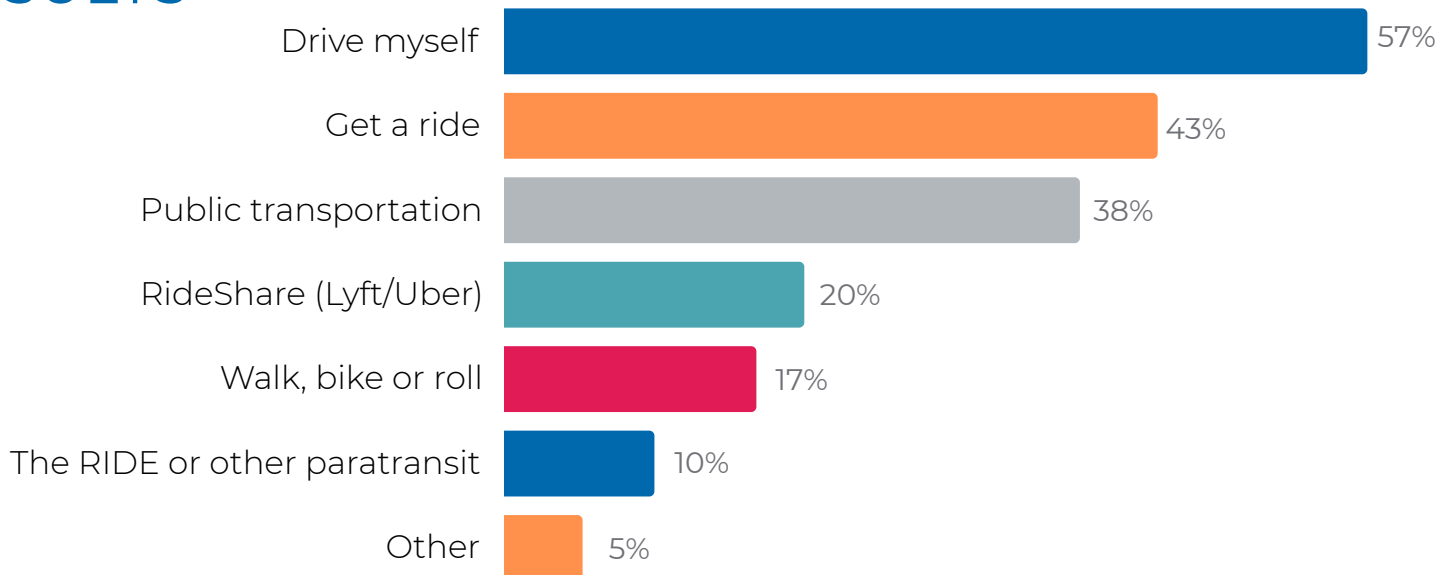
Q6 Cont.

ANALYSIS

This data reveals in the top three most chosen answers that the most influential factors are not explicitly tied to disability nor different than decision-making factors of other groups. Patrons are making choices primarily based on content, cost, and location, which are not unique to the disability community. However, while these factors are what motivate the individual to visit an organization, their equitable participation and engagement is often dependent on the organization's accessibility.

Q7 How do you usually travel to arts and cultural organizations? (check all that apply)

RESULTS



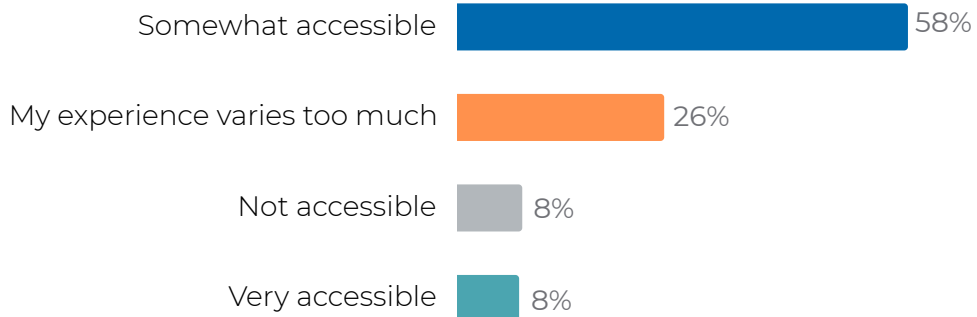
ANALYSIS

“Drive myself” being chosen the most emphasizes the importance of accessible parking at the site or nearby. In addition, it is important to note that all options were selected, once again highlighting the variety of individual needs and preferences and reminding us to not make assumptions about transportation needs. Therefore, it is important that individuals can easily access information about multiple ways of getting to an organization when considering visiting or employment.

Survey Content & Results

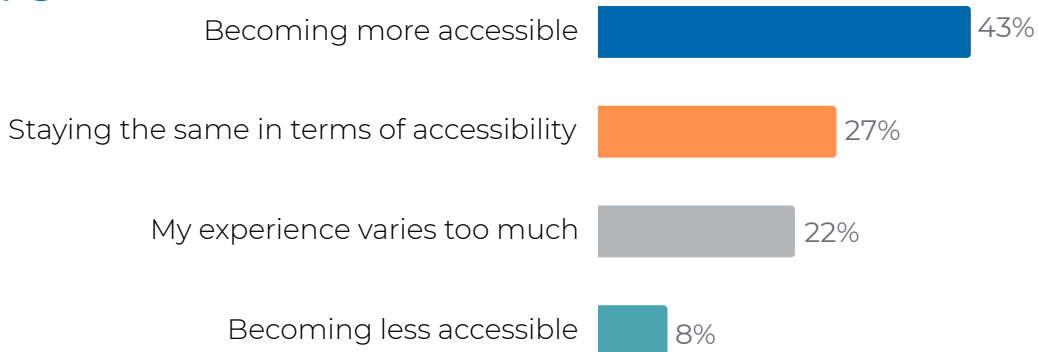
Q8 In your experience, how accessible are arts and culture organizations in Massachusetts?

RESULTS



Q9 In general, do you think Massachusetts arts and culture organizations in recent years are:

RESULTS



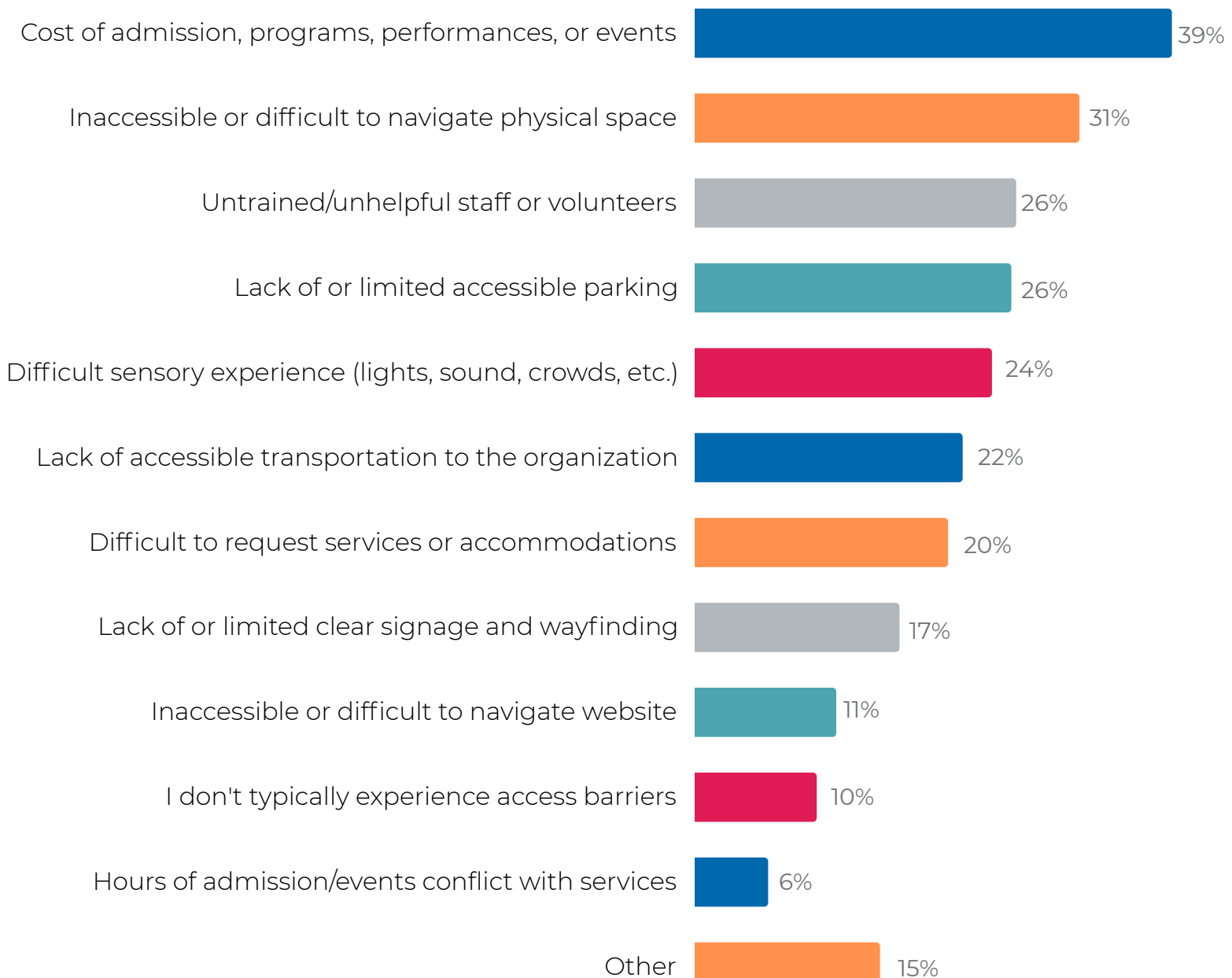
ANALYSIS

At first glance, the majority choosing “Somewhat accessible” in Q8 and 43% choosing “Becoming more accessible” in Q9 offers an impression of progress. However, it is important to look at the whole data set to see the full picture. When the other three answer choices in Q9 are combined, for example, we see the combined 57% indicating organizations are not improving or there is too much variety in their experience. These two questions result, then, in the takeaway that, while organizations may be moving in the right direction, they can do better and should not become complacent.

Survey Content & Results

Q10 Which access barriers do you (or the person/people you care for) most often experience when visiting or engaging with arts and culture organizations in Massachusetts? (choose up to 3)

RESULTS



Survey

Content & Results

Q10

Cont.

“People only think about access for audiences not for artists that they hire or that work in their spaces. I have been told that services like a stair lift are only for audiences as opposed to the dancers who teach, take class, rehearse, or attend meetings”

ANALYSIS

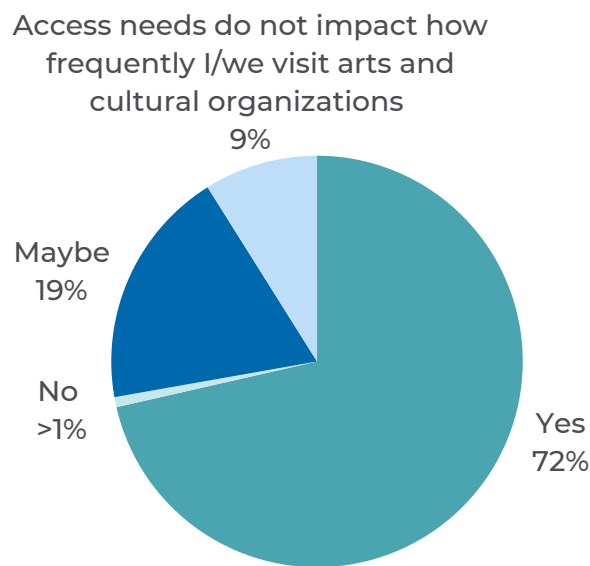
It is positive to see websites ranked low on this list of barriers since Q5 revealed that websites are the primary source of information among this group of respondents. Again the individuality and variety of needs and experiences is demonstrated in the data distribution across barriers, and reflected in no barrier being chosen more than 39% of the time. It is notable that “Untrained/unhelpful staff or volunteers” is among the top three, as staff and volunteers are integral to people’s experiences. Ensuring human-to-human interactions are equitable, caring, and not causing harm is a critical part of access. Additionally, while not all organizations can readily make physical changes to their physical facilities, training staff and volunteers is something that all organizations can and should readily prioritize.

The barrier most chosen was “Cost of admission, programs, performances, or events” at 39%, which may speak to the intersectionality of disability and economics including barriers to employment and additional costs associated with having a disability. However, this is a complex intersection of systems with many nuances, and this data should not perpetuate the idea that all people with disabilities experience financial barriers to participation. The “Continued Learning” section at the end of this report contains resources that expand upon this intersection.

Survey Content & Results

Q11 Would you visit arts and cultural organizations more often if they were more accessible or better met your access needs?

RESULTS



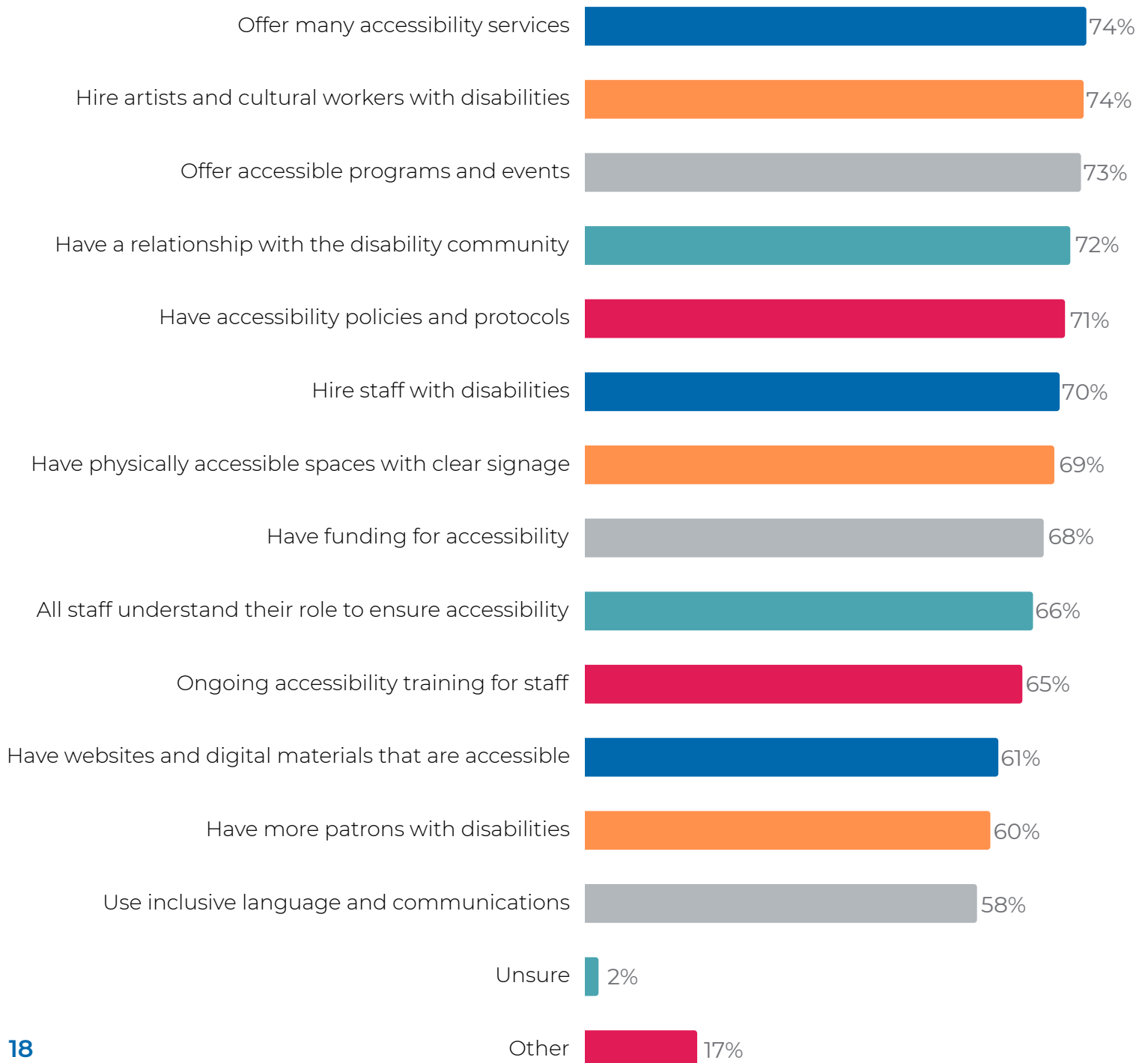
ANALYSIS

The overwhelming “Yes” is a strong message to organizations that if they do the work, people with disabilities will come. Access, then, can be viewed as both a moral and financial investment that organizations make. As we noted in *Towards a Culture of Access (2022)*, by excluding people with disabilities from their audiences, organizations are excluding the third largest market segment (AIR, 2018) in the US. For Massachusetts specifically, this includes approximately 1.4 million people. However, it is critical to center that including people with disabilities is first and foremost a “cultural need worthy of respect and understanding,” as Art-Reach colleagues articulate. They further remind us that the disability community adds value to all spaces, even if an organization does not profit financially. This work is about people, and people will choose to be in spaces that have earned their trust.

Survey Content & Results

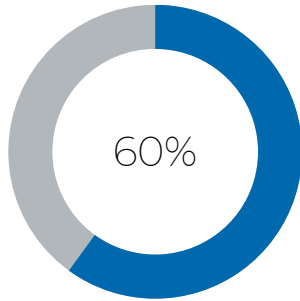
Q14 Which characteristics should be true of the most accessible arts and culture organizations? (check all that apply)

RESULTS



Survey Content & Results

Q14
Cont.



Is the average percent each category was chosen

“If an organization is trying to shift from less inclusive/accessible to more inclusive, the responsibility is on them to communicate clearly and consistently about access/inclusion. To leave it to the person impacted serves to erase the way able-bodied people collectively pretend we don't exist or, if we do exist, they have no responsibility in creating spaces and experiences that include and strengthen this kind of diversity.”

“Understanding that not all disabilities are visible. I am not a wheelchair user but need accessible seating.”

ANALYSIS

It is notable that each category was chosen over half the time, with the exception of “unsure.” It is also notable that no category was chosen 100% of the time, reinforcing individual preferences. Though still chosen 60% of the time “Have more patrons with disabilities” was among categories least chosen. This may have a connection to Q6 and its analysis. Because Q6 told us that the three most influential factors in choosing to visit an organization are cost, content, and location, survey respondents may not assume having a patron-base with large or small amounts of people with disabilities to be indicative of the organizations access. When looking at “Other” write-in responses, 10 out of 42 mentioned COVID-19 related policies, which also affect patronage.

Survey Content & Results

Q14 Cont.

In a separate survey to arts and culture organizations, we also asked what characteristics should be true of accessible organizations and provided the same answer choices. The responses with the most contrast between the two surveys are shared below to show how these two groups prioritize access differently.



Survey Content & Results

Q14 Cont.

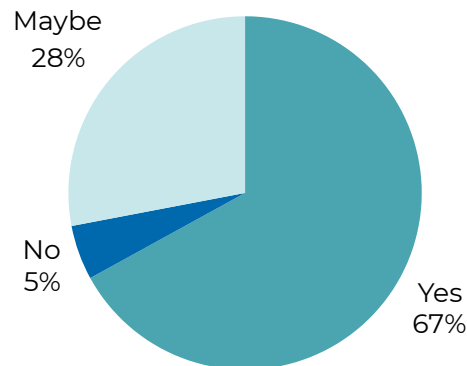
ANALYSIS

To provide more insight, we compared this question's data to the responses we received from organizations through a different survey conducted by Open Door Arts in 2023. Here we saw that, overall, people with disabilities selected more categories, more often than organizations. The above chart shows eight categories with the most contrast. Among these are budget and representation where we see people with disabilities giving these categories much more value than organizations did. These discrepancies illustrate a disconnect in priorities between people and organizations

Q15

Would you be more likely to visit an arts and culture organization if you knew the state had recognized them for excellence in accessibility?

RESULTS



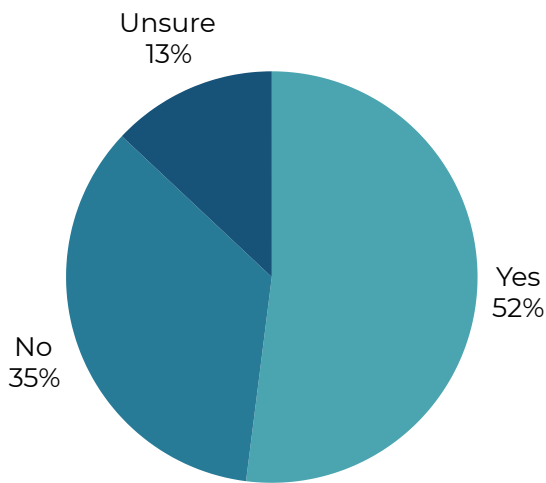
ANALYSIS

The overwhelming “yes” reinforces the role of trust. When individuals know they are more likely to be able to trust an organization and have a positive experience, they are more likely to engage. One method of providing this is through sources of credibility. Training and certification programs, like the Mass Cultural Council’s Universal Participation (UP) Initiative in Massachusetts, are one example of how organizations have sought this credibility.

Survey Content & Results

Q18 Would you be interested in information about careers and employment at arts and cultural organizations?

RESULTS

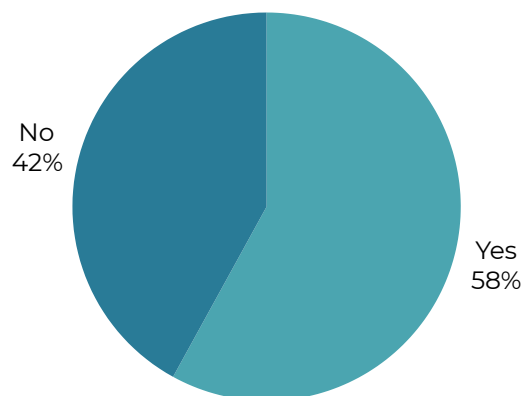


ANALYSIS

This data demonstrates significant interest by respondents in careers at arts and cultural organizations. This underscores the need for organizations to be accessible to folks internally as well as externally. Too often people with disabilities are thought of exclusively as patrons, and not as members of administrative or artistic staff, or leadership.

Q19 Do you also identify as an artist or cultural worker with a disability who works or collaborates with arts and cultural organizations in MA?

RESULTS

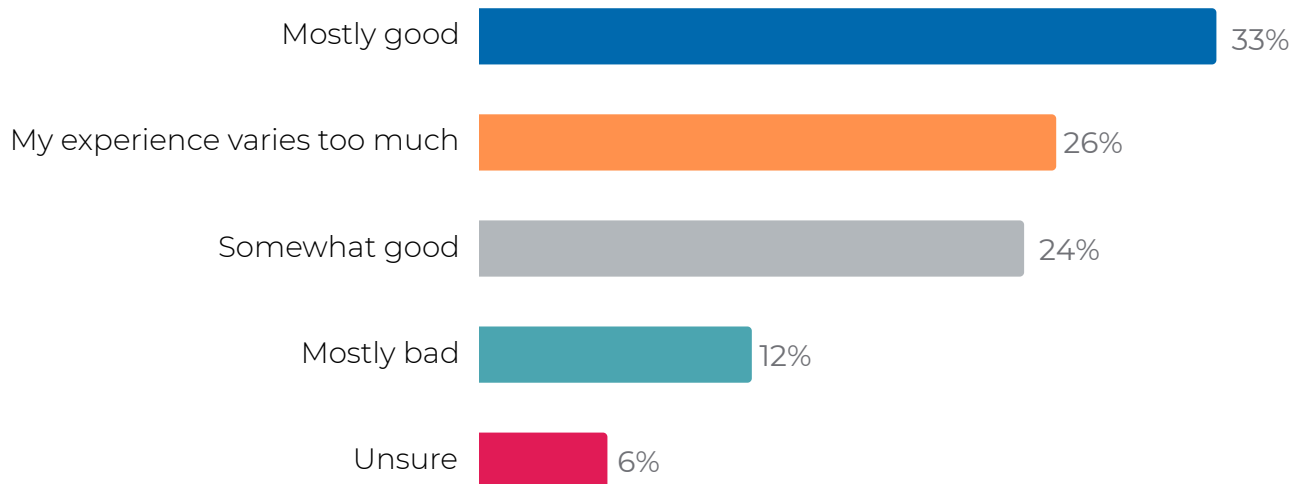


Survey Content & Results

Q20 and Q21 were exclusively asked of the 147 respondents who answered “Yes” to identifying as an artist or cultural worker with a disability who works or collaborates with arts and cultural organizations in MA in Q19

Q20 **How would you describe your experience as an artist or cultural worker working or collaborating with arts and cultural organizations in Massachusetts?**

RESULTS



ANALYSIS

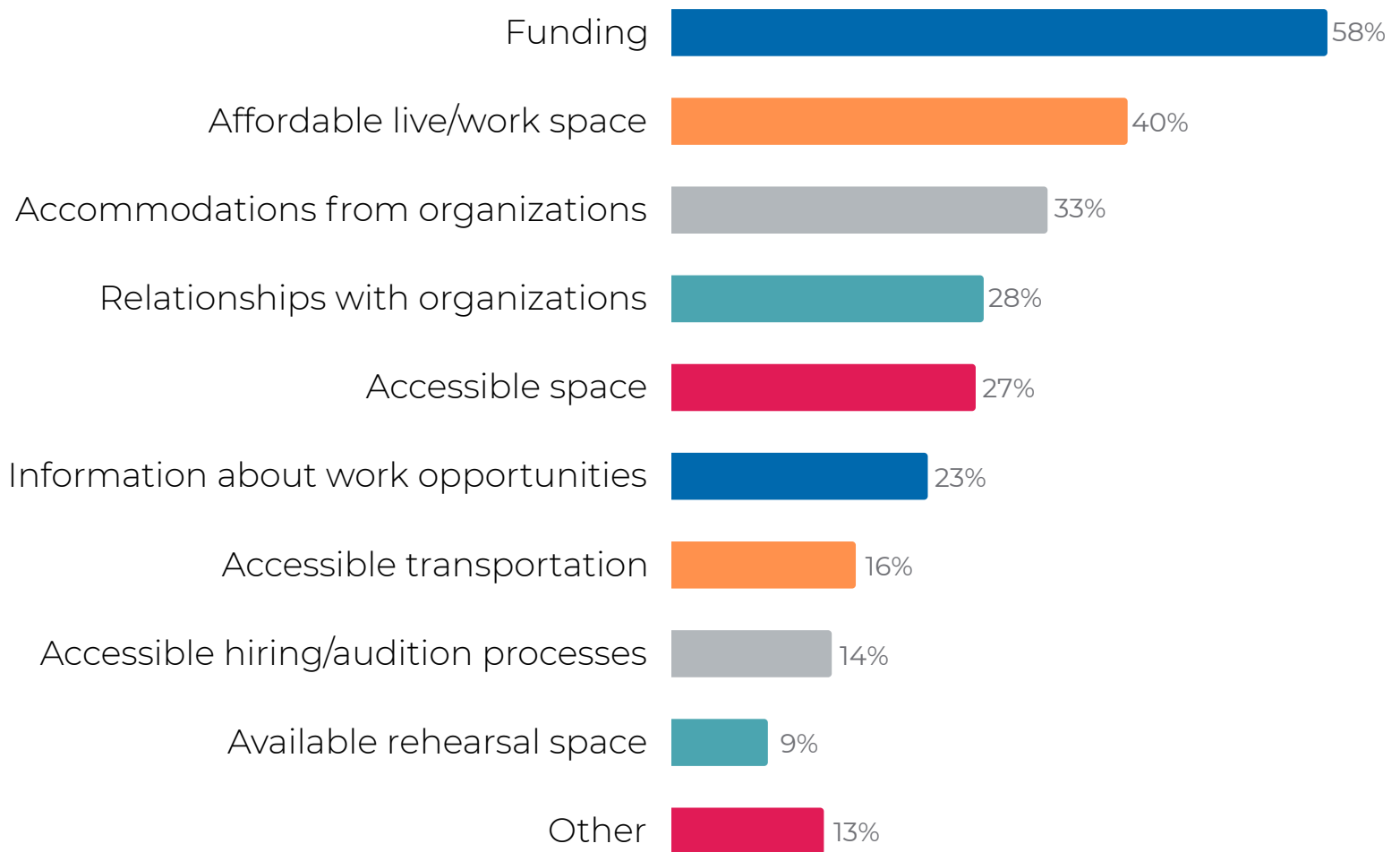
We see a fairly even distribution across “Mostly good,” “Somewhat good,” and “My experience varies too much across organizations to generalize.” This shows that the variety and inconsistency in experience reported by visitors and patrons is also experienced by artists and cultural workers. While “Mostly good” is the most chosen and may initially spark optimism, it was only chosen 33% of the time making the majority of responses collectively among the other answer choices. Overall, organizations need to do better by artists and cultural workers with disabilities.

Survey Content & Results

Q21 What are the three greatest barriers you have experienced as an artist or cultural worker?
(choose up to 3)

RESULTS

Lack of or limited...



Survey

Content & Results

Q21

Cont.

“People assuming that they know what services I will need rather than asking me for my access needs. Venues that think that because they have an accessible performance space for audiences but do not consider how inaccessible the backstage areas are when they hire me.”

ANALYSIS

While the answer choices offered were tailored to be specifically relevant to employment, it is important to remember that all access features/services mentioned in Q3 also remain critically relevant to respondents answering this question.

The role of economics appears again in this data as “Lack of or limited funding for independent work” and “Lack of or limited affordable live/work space” are the two most chosen responses. These barriers show a need for more systems and structures that financially support artists and cultural workers with disabilities long term. Many of these supports are within the control of organizations such as paying artists fairly, building and sustaining relationships, and providing accommodations and accessible space for artists and cultural workers.

Survey Key Findings

Analysis of survey data revealed three key findings:

1. People with disabilities will engage with organizations they trust

Survey data revealed that trust is among the most influential factors for people with disabilities when deciding to engage with organizations. This includes data findings unequivocally stating that more people with disabilities would engage with organizations if organizations better met their access needs and if their accessibility was previously vetted by trusted individuals or qualified sources. Individuals also indicated greater trust in organizations that more authentically represent and include people with disabilities as artists, employees, and leaders.

2. Uncertainty and inconsistency in accessibility experiences create barriers for people with disabilities

Survey data indicates that there is too much variation in the way people experience accessibility across organizations, and that many people with disabilities do not know which features exist at which organizations and when or how to request services. This unreliability creates fatigue, burden, and hardship for people with disabilities which ultimately can discourage engagement. Furthermore, knowing that people with disabilities would visit organizations more often if they were more accessible prompts a call for organizations to improve access experiences and become more dependable to the disability community.

3. Access is not one-size-fits-all

Throughout the survey we consistently saw evidence emphasizing the variety and range of individual needs, preferences, and barriers experienced. This reinforces the importance of not making assumptions about what people or groups of people need or prefer, and offering a wide range of flexible options allowing each individual to make the choices that best meet their needs.

Call to Action

"I've been asked to do disability and access trainings by well-meaning organizations that want checklists, the ten things they can do to make things accessible. I know that if they do those things, without changing their internal worlds...they can have all the ASL and ramps in the world, and we won't come where we're not loved, needed, and understood as leaders, not just people they must begrudgingly provide services for."

— Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha,
"Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice"

Disabled people matter as visitors and audiences, and also as creators, decision makers, and leaders in all aspects of our organizations. We don't need surveys to tell us that disabled people matter or why they should be included and represented, but we hope the information included in this report challenges us to embrace and pursue collective accountability and action to build an arts and cultural sector that truly reflects the full range of our human experience.

We call on our colleagues to join us in being responsive to the voices included in this data and embrace the understanding that if we are not actively including people with disabilities, then we are, by definition, excluding, and we need to do better. If the arts are about building community and sharing that which make us human, then disabled people must be central to our organizations and work.

Call to Action

In the spirit of collective action and accountability, we hope you and your organization find the recommendations and best practices shared below to be helpful wherever you are in this process. We remind our colleagues that these recommendations and the resources we share on the following page are by no means a comprehensive list. As access advocates remind us time and time again, access work is not, nor can it be fully captured in, a checklist. This work is ongoing and ever evolving.

- Build relationships with disabled people, artists, and communities.
- Ensure people with disabilities are represented within your organization as staff, artists, leadership and advisors.
- Conduct an accessibility self-assessment and/or audit to better understand where your organization is and create an improvement plan ([click here](#) for the free Arts & Culture Accessibility Self-Assessment or visit www.ArtsAccessResources.org). Ensure consultants and User/Experts with disabilities are involved in the process.
- Offer a range of options for engaging with your organization so patrons can choose those that best meet their needs, preferences, and interests.
- Familiarize yourself with how access regulations apply to your organization. Legal compliance is not the end goal, but it is an important step to ensure inclusion ([click here](#) or go to bit.ly/ArtsAccessIDTool for a free tool to help you identify which access regulations apply to your organization).
- Appoint a person to lead accessibility efforts within your team. Ensure they are clear about their responsibilities and receive ongoing training, support, and resources. Share their contact information publicly.
- Provide clear, detailed information in multiple formats and platforms about your organization's physical and programmatic accessibility, and ways to request accommodations or access services.
- Conduct a web accessibility audit for your website and establish protocol for ensuring future updates and additions meet accessibility standards.

Call to Action

- Ensure you're following best practices for accessibility in your communications and marketing practices, including social media use.
- Identify mechanisms for mitigating cost barriers for participation including individual and collective initiatives.
- Develop an access grievance procedure and clear mechanisms to receive feedback about accessibility from visitors and staff.
- Engage an Access Advisory Board or Committee that primarily includes people with disabilities, for your organization and compensate them for their work and expertise.
- Ensure your entire team receives regular training on accessibility best practices.
- Create a budget line item for access for your organization, as well as for every program, event, and service you provide.

Resources & Support

There are many individuals and organizations that can support your work through training, consulting, auditing/assessment, physical access improvements, and more. Need recommendations? Contact admin@OpenDoorArtsMA.org

To support organizations in this work, Open Door Arts has created various resources:

- A free comprehensive **accessibility self-assessment tool** specifically for arts and culture organizations that was developed with valued partners. To access the self-assessment tool, [click here](#) or go to www.ArtsAccessResources.org
- A free tool to help you **identify which access regulations apply to your organization**. [Click here](#) or go to bit.ly/ArtsAccessIDTool to access the tool.
- A comprehensive **centralized Hub of accessibility resources**, information, services, and training for arts and culture organizations to be publicly available soon. Sign up at www.ArtsAccessHub.org to be notified when the Hub is available
- A comprehensive **glossary of accessibility terms** with concise definitions and additional resources for learning. [Click here](#) or go to bit.ly/ArtsAccessGlossary to access the glossary.

By working together, sharing resources, listening to and learning from each other we can maximize our impact and grow as a sector. The following page has additional resources to guide your work.

Continued Learning

BOOKS & BLOGS

[Disability Visibility by Alice Wong](#)

[Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha](#)

[Demystifying Disability by Emily Ladau](#)

[Skin, Tooth, and Bone: The Basis of Movement is Our People by Sins Invalid](#)

[Disability Visibility Project blog by Alice Wong](#)

[Blog by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha](#)

[“Leaving Evidence” blog by Mia Mingus](#)

[Blog by Sins Invalid](#)

[Slow Walkers See More blog by Heather Watkins](#)

WEBSITE SUPPORT

[Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.2](#)

[National Center for Accessible Media \(NCAM\)](#)

MISCELLANEOUS

[Access is Love Resource List & Recommended Actions](#)

[Smithsonian Access Resources for Museum Professionals](#)

[NEA 2010 ADA Tip sheet](#)

[FINANCIAL INEQUALITY: Disability, Race and Poverty in America](#)

[Disability & Socioeconomic Status](#)



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