Creating Accessible Marketing Strategies

Levitt Foundation

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Elizabeth Ralston Consulting

About Elizabeth

☆ I am a consultant who guides organizations in the strategic development of an accessibility road map, with an emphasis on equity and inclusion

☆ Skill set: training, event planning, program development, outreach, and strategic communications

☆ Public Health and Nonprofit background

☆ I am deaf and use cochlear implants

☆ Peace Corps Volunteer, Malawi

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Today's learning objectives

By the end of our session, you will:

- Identify reasons why making your marketing accessible makes good business sense
- Learn strategies to make your digital, print, and communications materials accessible
- Learn some tips to make your website more accessible
- Learn about ways to communicate about the accessibility of a physical space

Why should you make your marketing accessible?

Warm up

What are some benefits to making your marketing accessible?

Accessible marketing is good because:

Accessible marketing is also good:

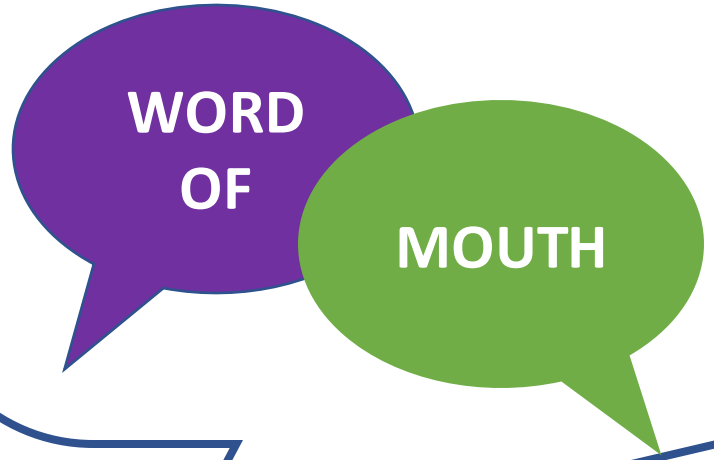
Consumers with disabilities represent a powerful part of the economy:

A $Billion market segment!

$Billions

Accessible marketing is also good:

People often like to go to outdoor events with friends and family. If there are accessible offerings, someone may see it and tell a person with a disability about it. **AND they could become a donor!**



is powerful!

Strategies to make your marketing accessible

Accessible Marketing Strategies

The good news: It is not that difficult to make your materials accessible!

The more inclusive you are, the more diverse your audience will be!

The $64 million dollar question:

How do you get patrons with disabilities to come?

If they don't know what you offer, they won't come!

The main question you should ask:

Can your communication and marketing materials be accessed by anyone?

Communications strategies

E- Newsletters and Blogs

- ✓ Captioning, transcripts and audio description for videos
- ✓ Transcripts for podcasts
- ✓ Alt-text for all photos/images
- ✓ Underlining words can be confusing to screenreaders– they pick those up as links
- ✓ Font is a good size (12 or greater)

PODCASTS

- ✓ Transcripts provided for people who cannot hear
- ✓ Visual description of who is talking

Example of an e-newsletter

THE NEXT 30 YEARS

Washington State Nonprofit Conference

Welcoming All: NAWA's Dedication to Accessibility

Virtual Conference
May 14-16
Tri-Cities | May 17
Spokane | May 20
Seattle | May 22

Hi Elizabeth,

NAWA is committed to making our learning spaces welcoming and inclusive to people of all abilities. As Director of Learning, I am on a continuous journey to build my skills and practices to create supportive learning spaces for everyone including at the Washington State Nonprofit Conference. Read on to learn about steps we are taking and visit the Conference accessibility webpage for more details.

Captioning
Captioning helps people with hearing loss or deafness and can also be helpful for people for whom English is not their first language. Captions also support people with normal hearing who may be participating from a noisy space.

- Online: The Conference will have live captioning for our online keynote sessions and automated captioning for workshops.
- In-Person: Automated captions will be available through Wordly for the featured speakers at the Regional Celebration. Captions will be displayed on a screen, but you also have the option of accessing them on your personal smart device.

Interpretation and Translation
We are pleased to offer live Spanish interpretation during the online keynote sessions. For online workshops and in-person Regional Celebrations, automated translation services will be offered through Wordly.

Wordly is available in over 30 languages and can be accessed by QR code or by going directly to the Wordly website in a browser while at the conference. You can read the transcript in the language of your choice on your device, but if you would like to listen to the translated transcript, you will need to provide your earphones.

Digital Marketing Strategies

Social Media:

Use social media channels to amplify accessible programs and events

The Problems:

Consider that these are totally visual platforms

E.G. Screenreaders do not work on Instagram stories

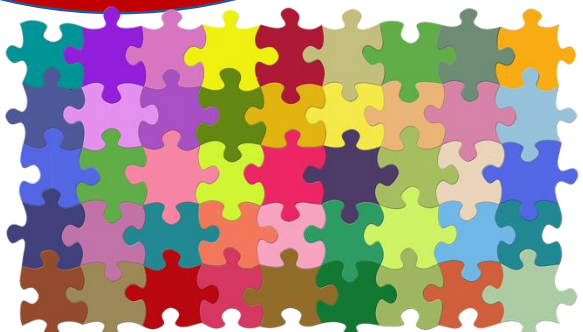
Digital Marketing Strategies (con't)

Videos and Instagram Stories:
Add Subtitles/Captions

Images: Provide alt-text

Emojis: Minimize use

Most videos are watched on mute, so captions/subtitles benefit EVERYONE



Alt Text

ALT TEXT

Shortened from "alternative text," this is a short visual description that provides a general sense of the content of an image. It is structured as a sentence fragment that indicates the most important content of the image; it is approximately fifteen words and contains no period at the end unless it is a complete sentence.

Example:

Portrait of former First Lady Michelle Obama seated looking directly at us

Digital Marketing Strategies (con't)

Capitalize Each Word in Instagram Hashtags:
If you do this, accessibility screen readers will be able to correctly read out your hashtags.
Otherwise they will read the hashtag as one word, EG:

#Iloveconcerts
VS
#ILoveConcerts

Digital Marketing Strategies, con't

Consider Audio/Verbal Description: Verbalize visual details during stories and videos. Have speakers give a visual description of themselves, their surroundings and as much detail of what they are showing people.

STANDING AT A PODIUM

SITTING WITH LAPTOP AT A TABLE

IN FRONT OF A WHITEBOARD

Audio Description example

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7j4_aP8dWA

Visual Description example

https://vimeo.com/860569013?fl=pl&fe=sh

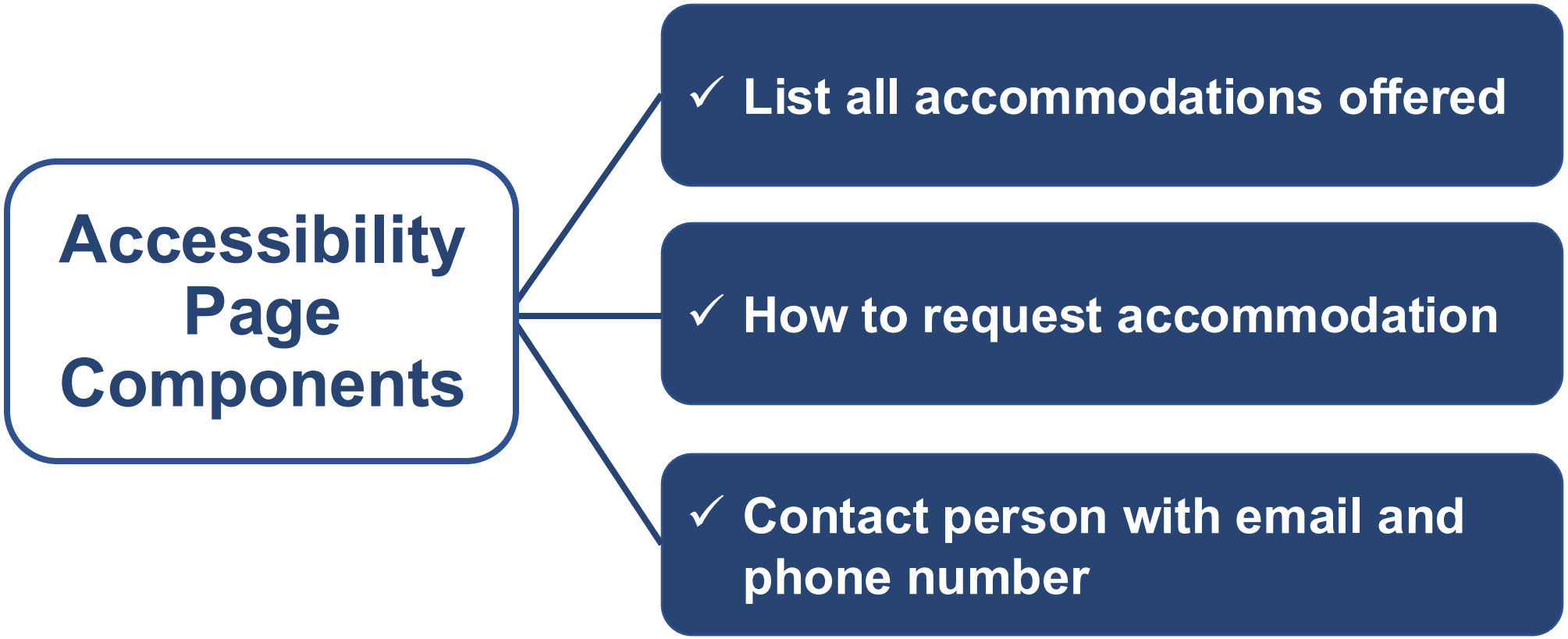
Timestamp to watch: 00:34-1:00

Website Accessibility Tips

What are the questions to ask:

- ✓ Have you done a **website accessibility audit**?
- ✓ Is the website accessible to **blind/low-vision** visitors?
- ✓ Are videos **captioned and transcripts** also provided?
- ✓ Can videos be **audio described**? If not, include a transcript with descriptions of images and action.
- ✓ Are images embedded with **alt-text** or image descriptions?
- ✓ Is the **font at least 16 pt or larger** and is there **good color contrast**?

Does your website have an accessibility page?



Accessibility page example: Smithsonian Festival

SMITHSONIAN FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL

Thanks for making 2025 a success! You can support the future of the Festival by making a tax-deductible donation. ×

VISIT

Accessibility Services

We strive to maintain an accessible and inclusive environment for all Festival visitors, participants, staff, and volunteers.

The Accessibility tent is located near the center of the National Mall on the Festival grounds, approximately 330 feet directly north of the Smithsonian Metro's National Mall exit.

Information and service schedules will be updated on this page throughout the Festival.

The Festival is located on the National Mall between 7th and 12th streets and inside the Arts and Industries Building. Selected events during the Festival will also take place inside the National Museum of the American Indian, the National Museum of American History,

VIDEO

https://festival.si.edu/accessibility

Smithsonian Festival Program

*** Events marked with asterisks have selected accessibility services by request only. Please review the accessibility offerings in the event listing and be sure to indicate your request when you register.*

Time	Session	Type	Registration	Accessibility
Friday, June 25				
6–7 p.m.	Encuentro en el Smithsonian: Telmary Díaz	Story Circle	Streaming online	CC
Saturday, June 26				
10–11:30 a.m.	Quechua Pom-Poms + Tassels	Community Workshop	SOLD OUT	CC **
12–1 p.m.	Placemaking, Collective Care, and Culture: A Conversation with Global Practitioners	Story Circle	Streaming online	CC
1–4 p.m.	Backstrap Weaving with Nilda Callañaupa, Part 1	Master Workshop	SOLD OUT	CC **
2–3 p.m.	Languages of Home and Diaspora: Nourishing Palestine in Food and Verse	Story Circle	Streaming online	CC
4–5 p.m.	Stories in Stone: Master Artisans on Tools, Technique, and Meaning	Story Circle	Streaming online	CC

What are overlays and why you shouldn't use them

- ✓ Overlays are a broad term for technologies that aim to improve the accessibility of a website. They apply third-party source code (typically JavaScript) to make improvements to the front-end code of the website.
- ✓ Full compliance can not be achieved with overlays
- ✓ They fail to address inherent access barriers. For example, missing alternative text, proper labeling, multimedia captioning and transcription, keyboard access, etc. An overlay cannot fix these things.
- ✓ Many disabled individuals already have the software that they require to navigate the web and can easily leverage features already built into their browsers and operating systems

Source: https://overlayfactsheet.com/en/ and https://shouldiuseanaccessibilityoverlay.com/

So what is the solution?

Make your website accessible from the very beginning:

Universal Design!

Summary

VIDEOS	✓ Captions and Transcripts ✓ Audio description if appropriate
PODCASTS	✓ Transcripts
PHOTOS	✓ Captions ✓ Alt-text/image descriptions
IMAGES/ GRAPHICS	✓ Alt-text

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Print Collateral Strategies

Postcard mailers

Thank you cards

Annual Report

Posters

Things to consider:

Can everyone read your materials?

Can they be sent in different ways (email, large print, braille, videos, etc)?

When announcing events or programs, is accessibility information up front and center?

Think about using multiple modalities

An example:

What is missing from both sides of the postcard?

What is missing from both sides of the postcard?

Postcard with accessibility information

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
APR 21 – MAY 14				21 7:30	22 7:30	23 7:30
24 2:00	25	26	27	28 7:30	C 29 7:30	A 30 7:30
A 1 2:00	2 7:30	3	4	5 7:30	6 7:30	7 7:30
S 8 2:00	9	10	11	12 7:30	13 7:30	14 7:30

A ASL-interpreted performances.

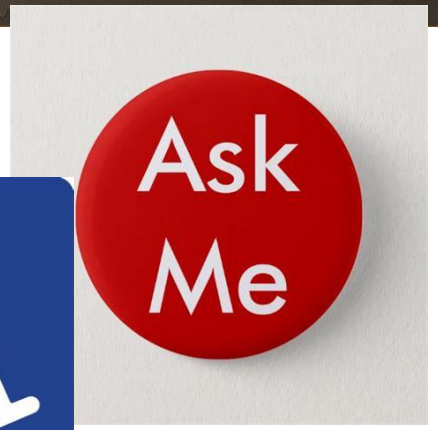
C Captioned performance.

S Sensory Friendly Performance

Communicating about accessibility at the physical space

At the Event

What elements of accessibility are you going to display to your public?



Examples of Physical Accessibility: Review

- ✓Maps with symbols indicating location of access tools
- ✓Quiet Space
- ✓Accessibility Booth
- ✓Signage
- ✓Viewing platforms and Mobi mats for uneven terrain
- ✓Accessible Dining Options
- ✓Communications on accessibility of the physical space

Accessibility booths

Viewing platforms and mobi mats for uneven terrain

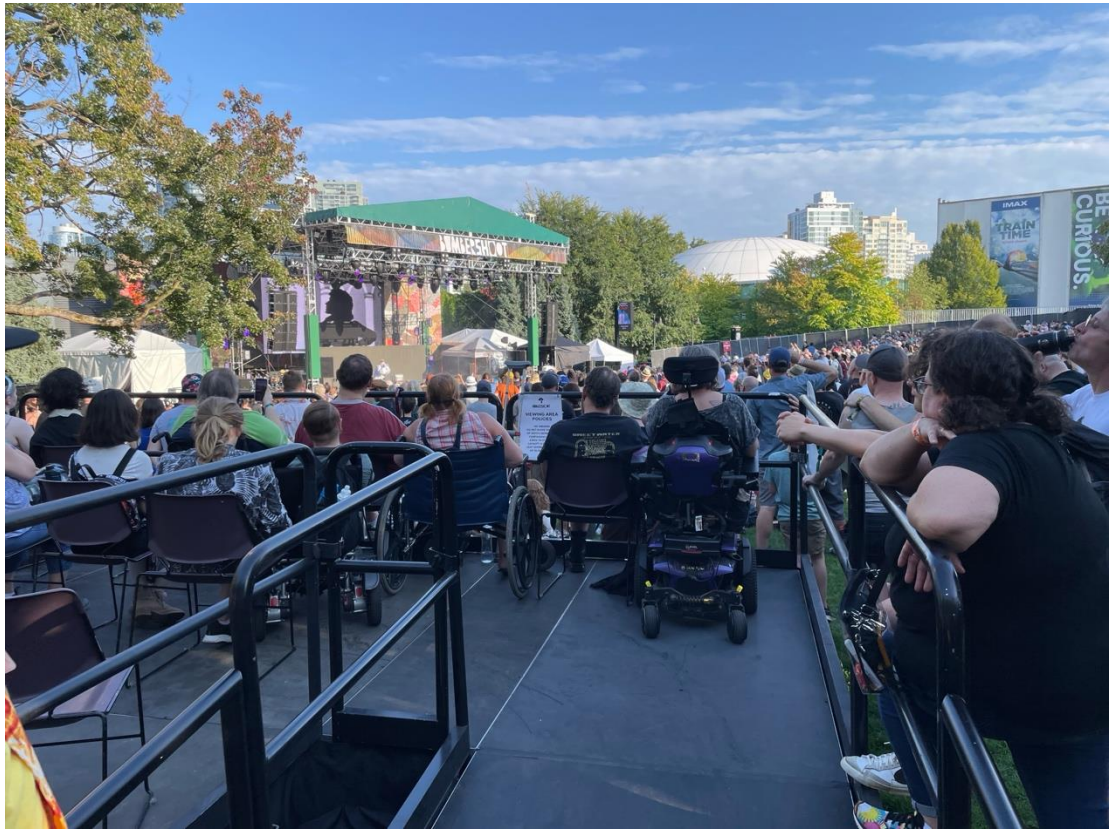
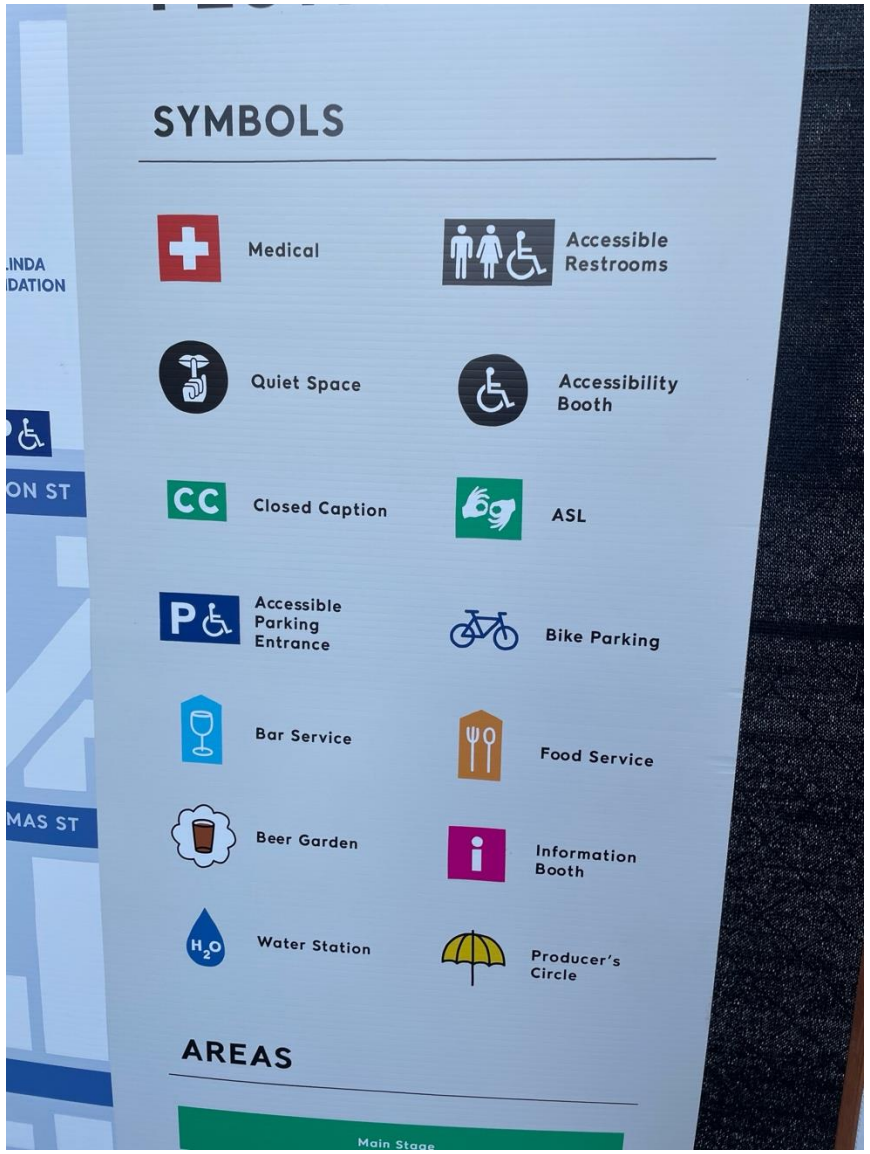


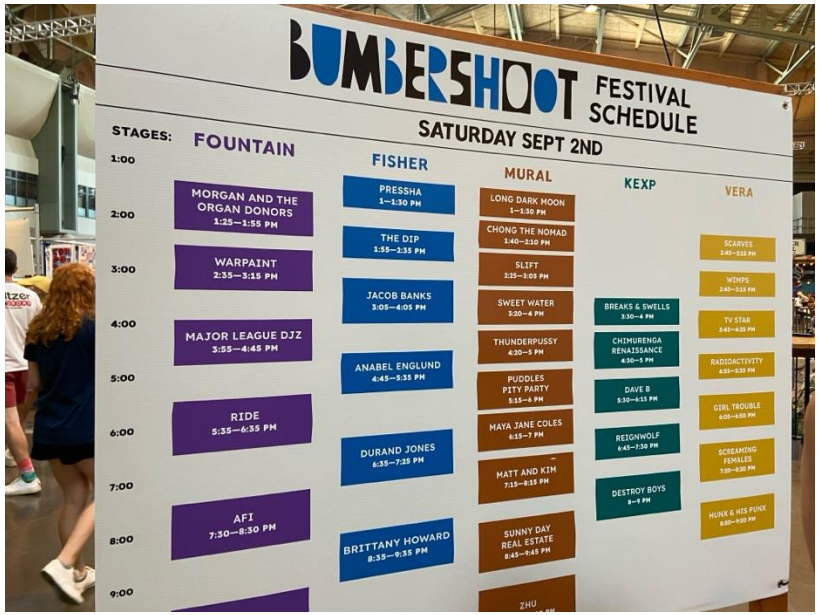
Photo by Syren Nagakyrie, Disabled Hikers

Festival maps

Signage

BUMBERSHOOT
ACCESSIBILITY VIEWING


SYMBOLS
Medical
Accessible Restrooms
Quiet Space
Accessibility Booth
CC
Closed Caption
ASL
Accessible Parking Entrance
Bike Parking
Bar Service
Food Service
Beer Garden
Information Booth
Water Station
Producer's Circle
AREAS
Main Stage


BUMBERSHOOT FESTIVAL SCHEDULE
SATURDAY SEPT 2ND
STAGES:
FOUNTAIN
FISHER
MURAL
KEXP
VERA
MORGAN AND THE ORGAN DONORS 1:25—1:55 PM
WARPAINT 2:35—3:15 PM
MAJOR LEAGUE DJZ 3:55—4:45 PM
RIDE 5:35—6:35 PM
AFI 7:30—8:30 PM
PRESSHA 1—1:30 PM
THE DIP 1:55—2:35 PM
JACOB BANKS 3:05—4:05 PM
ANABEL ENGLUND 4:45—5:35 PM
DURAND JONES 6:35—7:25 PM
BRITTANY HOWARD 8:35—9:35 PM
LONG DARK MOON 1—1:30 PM
CHONG THE NOMAD 1:40—2:10 PM
SLIFT 2:25—3:05 PM
SWEET WATER 3:20—4 PM
THUNDERPUSSY 4:20—5 PM
PUDDLES PITY PARTY 5:15—6 PM
MAYA JANE COLES 6:15—7 PM
MATT AND KIM 7:15—8:15 PM
SUNNY DAY REAL ESTATE 8:45—9:45 PM
ZHU
BREAKS & SWELLS 3:30—4 PM
CHIMURENGA RENAISSANCE 4:30—5 PM
DAVE B 5:30—6:15 PM
REIGNWOLF 6:45—7:30 PM
DESTROY BOYS 8—9 PM
SCARVES
WIMPS
TV STAR
RADIOACTIVITY
GIRL TROUBLE 6:05—6:50 PM
SCREAMING FEMALES 7:30—8:30 PM
HUNX & HIS PUNX 8:50—9:50 PM

Accessible dining options

Long lines at food truck

No seating at food truck

Food vendor with accessible purchase point

Strategies for communicating about accessibility features

SIGNAGE

Hearing Loop or Assistive Listening Device (ALD) symbols, wheelchair accessible symbol, restrooms, accessible entrances, accessibility booth, quiet space

BUTTONS/ TSHIRTS/VESTS

Like “Ask me” or “Access Qs” for volunteers, ushers, staff, point people

VIDEOS OF THE SPACE

Develop a virtual tour of your space to explain the physical accessibility features

See example: https://www.facebook.com/reel/763225082832468

Sources and Additional Reading Material

Overlays:

- Mark Root-Wiley: Why I won't install an accessibility overlay: https://mrwweb.com/i-wont-install-an-accessibility-overlay/
- https://overlayfactsheet.com/
- Great Lakes ADA Center video on overlays https://www.accessibilityonline.org/ada-tech/archives/111028
- Legal Update: Accessibility Overlay Edition
- Lainey Feingold: Legal Update: Accessibility Overlay https://www.lflegal.com/2021/11/overlay-legal-update/

Sources and Additional Reading Material

Website accessibility: https://webaim.org/

Digital Accessibility:

- Rooted in Rights: https://rootedinrights.org/resources/accessthat/digital-accessibility/

- **Social Media**: Accessible Social: Accessible best practices for social media content
  - Social Media Best Practices: https://www.elizabethralston.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Social-Media-Best-Practices-FINAL.pdf
  - Alt-text Resources and Articles: https://www.elizabethralston.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Alt-Text-Resources-and-Articles-FINAL.pdf

Thank you!

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ER

Please fill out this survey!

https://forms.gle/A2yhd3XTizSqRzTz8