

## **Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition Design**

- I. Exhibition Content**
  - A. Exhibitions must make exhibit content accessible at multiple intellectual levels and present it through more than one sensory channel.**
  - B. Exhibitions must include the experiences of people with disabilities within their content and presentation.**
- II. Exhibition Items**
  - A. Items in exhibitions (e.g. artifacts, graphics, props) must be visually accessible to people.**
  - B. Items essential to the exhibition's main theme must be accessible to people by tactile examination (e.g. touching artifacts, reproductions, models) and/or comprehensive audio description.**
  - C. Items must not be placed in locations such that they create a hazard for visitors.**
- III. Label Text and Design**
  - A. Essential information in exhibition label text must be accessible to people who have difficulty reading English.**
  - B. Label design must present main exhibition copy legibly for all visitors. Such exhibition label information must be available within the galleries in alternative formats (e.g. Braille, audio) for people who cannot read print.**
- IV. Audiovisuals and Interactives**
  - A. All exhibition interactives, audio-only programs (e.g. music with lyrics and texts of speeches), and audiovisuals with soundtracks produced by the Smithsonian must be either open or closed captioned.**

**If an audio presentation not produced by the Smithsonian is shown in the exhibition for more than three months it must be captioned. If an audio presentation not produced by the Smithsonian is shown for fewer than three months it may be accompanied by a verbatim script mounted directly next to it.**

**Soundtracks of ambient sounds must be identified whether captioning or a script is used. Sounds may also be identified in label text.**

- B. Interactives and audiovisuals that do not have soundtracks must carry labels stating that fact to assure deaf and hard-of-hearing people that they are not missing information.**
- C. Audiovisual programs and computer interactives that present information with images and print must be audio described.**
- D. Instructions for proper use of interactives must be accessible to all visitors.**
- E. Controls for and operation of all interactives must be accessible and usable by all visitors.**
- F. Use of interactives must be from a location accessible to people using wheelchairs or other assistive devices (e.g. canes, crutches); interactives must not be blocked by furniture or other obstacles.**

**V. Circulation Route**

- A. The circulation route within the exhibition must be accessible according to the requirements of the Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Design for Facilities and Sites.**
- B. The circulation route must be well lighted, clearly defined, and easy to follow.**

**VI. Furniture**

- A. All cases must provide viewing access to people who are short or seated as well as to those who are standing.**
- B. Cases and vitrines must not present a safety hazard to any visitor.**
- C. Seating must be provided in each exhibition. 50% of the seats must be accessible. Single-gallery exhibitions must have seating in a nearby corridor or in an adjacent gallery space.**

**VII. Color**

- A. Gallery colors (floors, walls, furniture) must create an environment that is clearly articulated, comfortable and safe.**

- B. The colors and patterns of exhibition floor surfaces must give accurate information about the depth, height, and condition of the floor surface.**
- C. Colors within cases must provide clear visual access to objects inside.**
- D. Colors for labels must have a high contrast between text and background.**

#### **VIII. Lighting**

- A. The safety of visitors (particularly those with low vision and visual perceptual difficulties) must receive equal consideration with exhibit design and conservation issues.**
- B. Light and color must combine to produce a clearly delineated circulation route into, through, and out of every exhibition space. This is a particular requirement whenever there are changes in level or unexpected turns or obstacles in the route.**
- C. There must be sufficient light on objects to make them visible to all visitors unless the light level will do substantial damage to the objects.**
- D. There must be sufficient light on labels to make them readable by all visitors.**
- E. The elimination of glare from cases and on labels must be considered for those visitors who are seated as well as for those who are standing.**
- F. Sufficient light to accommodate speechreading and sign language conversation must be provided in locations throughout the exhibition space.**

#### **IX. Public Programming Spaces**

- A. In places of assembly with fixed seating, there must be a number of wheelchair locations provided in compliance with the requirements of the Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Design for Facilities and Sites. These locations must be dispersed throughout the seating area.**
- B. If seating is in the form of benches, the same number of benches with arm and back support as wheelchair locations required in the Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Design for Facilities and Sites must be provided.**

- C. Where there is fixed seating, there must also be aisle seats (one percent of the total number, with no fewer than one) that have no armrests, swing-away armrests, or removable armrests. These seats must be dispersed throughout the programming space.**
- D. Each seat without an armrest or with a removable or swing-away armrest must be identified on the armrest by the international symbol of access.**

**Signs notifying patrons of the existence of these chairs must also be posted at the entrance to the space. All signs must meet accessibility requirements.**

- E. Stages, dressing rooms, and other areas for performers associated with public programming areas must be accessible, according to the requirements of the Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Design for Facilities and Sites.**
  - F. Assistive listening systems must be provided in all public programming spaces.**
  - G. If the programming space is always kept dark, assistive devices (e.g. handrails, strip lighting) must be available to make accessible the route in, through, and out of the space.**
  - H. Seating color and material must make seats visually accessible to everyone.**
- X. Emergency Egress**
- A. There must be fully accessible emergency egress from the exhibition spaces. Provide as many accessible emergency exits from an exhibition space as the number of fire exits required by the National Fire Protection Association's Life Safety Code (NFPA 101).**
  - B. Design the exits from the exhibition to either lead back to the accessible entry route or to lead directly to another accessible egress route.**
  - C. Notification about locations of accessible egress from the gallery must be available at key points in the museum.**

**D. Both visual and audible fire alarm systems must be provided.**

**XI. Children's Environments**

**A. Areas designed specifically for children must meet the children's accessibility recommendations by the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board.**

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