Then, Now, Next: Developing a Comprehensive Access Program at the
Denver Art Museum
Building Blocks for Your Institution’s Access Program

Presented by Anne Stellmon and Robin Stolp

2019 NDS Workshop Handout
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About the Denver Art Museum

The mission of the Denver Art Museum is to enrich the lives of present and future generations through the acquisition, presentation, and preservation of art works. Its exemplary scholarship and public programming foster transformative experiences that spark creative thinking and expression.

Designed by internationally renowned architects Gio Ponti and Daniel Libeskind, the Denver Art Museum is one of the largest art museums between Chicago and the West Coast, providing over 450,000 square feet of exhibition and visitor-related space. The museum’s collection of over 70,000 works of art, divided among 12 permanent collections, reflect the city, region and world and offer invaluable ways for the community to learn about cultures from around the globe. Its collections include African, American Indian, Asian, European, Modern and Contemporary, Oceanic, pre-Columbian, Photography, Spanish Colonial, Textile Works and an internationally recognized Western Art collection.

The Denver Art Museum has been a leader in educational programming for more than two decades. Its family-friendly approach is fully integrated into the galleries through a unique partnership among curators, designers, and educators. With the addition of the Martin Building in June of 2020, this focus will be further enhanced and expanded. The museum’s three campuses will be joined to support lifelong learning and creative pursuits for visitors of all ages.

100 W. 14th Ave. Pkwy. Denver, CO 80204

www.denverartmuseum.org

720-865-5000
Welcome and Introduction

Workshop Goal: To help you move beyond access towards inclusion, to create an environment that meets the needs of every participant.

Workshop Objectives: To provide you with building blocks for developing or expanding an Access Program at your institution.

To present examples of the DAM hallmark programs for docent/guide-led tours.

To illustrate program methods through audience participation.

To answer participants’ questions about Access programs.

THEN: Limited Funding and Programming

Brief History of DAM Access Program

Practical First Steps for Developing an Initial Program

- Identify institutional goals for an Access program.
- Identify and evaluate current programming and institutional accessibility.
- Identify funding sources and budget needs.
- Create an advisory council and mission statement.
- Decide if an Access consultant is needed to guide development process.
- Research other institutional models.
- Determine necessary staff and define their responsibilities.
- Establish guidelines for docent/guide involvement.

Practical Second Steps for Your Program

- Implementation
  - Include existing advisory council, community responses, feedback from docents/guides.
  - Determine realistic scope of program and a timeline for a program implementation.
- Follow-up evaluation
  - Include existing advisory council, community responses, feedback from docents/guides.
  - Determine a timeline for program evaluation and adjust programming accordingly to include docent/guide involvement and training requirements.
NOW: DAM Vision Today—Comprehensive Programming to Welcome Visitors with Disabilities

- Access and Inclusion.
- Moving from simple access to promoting social justice.
- Examples of accommodations at the DAM:
  - Wheelchairs and walkers for loan at no cost.
  - Stools available for use in all galleries.
  - Accessible restrooms on every museum level.
  - Comfortable seating on every museum level.
  - Accessible parking.
  - ASL interpretation available.
  - All doors ADA compliant.
  - DAM Access programs are free to visitors with disabilities, plus one companion ticket for visitors who need 1:1 aid.

DAM Hallmark Access Programs Today

- Low Sensory Events
- ASL Interpretation
- Custom Access Tours
- Alzheimer’s and Dementia Tour (Art and About)
- Tactile Tables and Low Vision Mornings

Practical Access Tools for All Institutions

- The Three Core Skills for Verbal Descriptions: Observe, Analyze, Communicate-Do’s and Don’ts for Verbal Descriptions - See pages 6-7.
- Sample verbal description script - See page 8.
- Art & About Art Cards – Alzheimer’s and Dementia Tour.
- Tactiles - Sensational Blackboards, resin relief boards, foil material.
Next: Re-evaluating and Exploring New Avenues for Access Programming

- Plan docent/guide involvement.
  - Align docent/guide interest and commitment with programming needs.
  - Re-evaluate docent/guide interest, ensure docents/guides are committed, and recruit new blood if necessary.
  - Align docent/guide training with new programming.
- Invite guest trainers (community or national experts).

- Expand existing partnerships: Identify colleagues and partner organizations, locally and nationally, doing similar work.
- Solicit partner support for training, brainstorming, providing feedback and connecting with additional partners.
- Expand and add additional interpretations. Examples: Offer ASL interpretation and Spanish language public tours and programs.
- Include on website: Access statement, descriptions for all Access programs, and contact information.
- Develop in-gallery materials. Examples: Braille and large exhibition text, Spanish language text, tactiles.
- Enhance program development and components and enlist community participants.
- Secure more funding. Example: Explore the possibility of grants.

DAM Community Engagement Grant Overview-Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)
Creative Aging Project FY 19-21

- Program models
  - Themed loan boxes. Facilitate a "museum experience" in care facilities.
  - Community exhibitions co-created with older adults.
  - Artist led programs with art making, conversation and guided mindful looking.
- Evaluation
  - Ongoing evaluation to support program development.
  - Assess impacts on older adult participants and community partners.
  - Develop a framework to evaluate impacts on healthy aging in Denver.

Conclusion: You can do it, no matter how big or how small!

Q&A

Guided Audience Visualization – Sample visualization scripts - See pages 11-12.
The Three Core Skills-Do's and Don'ts for Verbal Descriptions (edited)
Audio Description Solutions Deborah B. Lewis, President. 2019

1. Observe

Do:
- Describe only what you see and describe it objectively.
- Describe what you see specifically and objectively, so that listeners may interpret the presented content for themselves.

Observe for exhibits

Do:
- Describe each exhibit space, its size, decor, the key features of the setting.
- Start with "where" something is located to help listeners with low vision to locate items.

Don't:
- Overlook the obvious.

2. Analyze

Do:
- Understand your audience.
- Describe significant details.

Don't:
- Summarize, editorialize, patronize, interpret, explain or help listeners in any other way.
- Describe something visual by comparing it to another visual that listeners will not have seen or encountered as an everyday expression.
- Describe every item with an equal amount of detail.

Analyze for exhibits

Do:
- Describe significant details that are essential to the exhibit.

Don't:
- Describe every aspect of the exhibit; concentrate on the most important parts.
- Overlook the obvious.
3. Communicate

Do:
- Go from the general to the specific, from the big picture to the little picture, giving listeners a sense of the whole before providing details.
- Guide listeners to form a mental picture of what others are seeing before providing interpretive information for contextualization.
- Provide orderly description to assist listeners in processing and comprehending the verbal information to form a mental picture.
- Describe essentials first and then, as time permits, describe further elements.
- Use vivid verbs and descriptive words.
- Include colors, textures, light, shadow, revealing details.
- Describe colors to help people with low vision locate what's being described.
- Allow listeners to consider the emotional and/or intellectual meaning or associations of the color.

Communicate for exhibits

Do:
- Describe the elements of an exhibit in an order that underscores its interpretive message.
- Describe from the observer's point of view. At the left, means as we are looking at the item.
- Round off measurements to the logical increment.
- Use metaphors when you are certain the listener will be familiar with the phrase being used.
- Guide the experience of the tactile items.

Don't:
- Overlook the obvious.
This work is an oil painting that was painted in 1873 by the French artist Gustave Doré. It was painted in the style of Romanticism, which is characterized by loose brush strokes that are flowing and imprecise. The obvious portrayal of emotions is an essential aspect of Romanticism.

The painting is approximately six feet high and four feet wide. There are three people in the painting, two adults and one child. The two adults, one male and one female, are approximately twenty-five to thirty years of age; the child is a boy and looks to be four or five years old. The adults are seated and the child is sitting on the woman’s lap. Much of the painting is in shade. There is a soft light falling on the child.

The three figures are life-size. The woman is in the center of the painting, sitting on a large musical drum that is on its side. In the lower right-hand corner, lying on the ground next to the drum, are a trumpet and barbells. A white curtain is drawn behind the three figures, isolating them.

The woman’s dress is long, pink, and filmy. A decorative cape of blue brocade is clasped at her shoulders and drapes from her shoulders to the ground. She is wearing a small crown and ballet slippers. The child is lying across the woman’s lap and she is holding the child’s head close to her chest. Her head is slightly bowed downwards toward the child, her eyes gently closed, her brow still, and her lips pressed lightly against the child’s head.

The child’s eyes are closed, his jaw is slack, and his mouth has fallen open. His head is resting under the woman’s chin. There is a white blood-stained bandage bound around his head. The color of his skin is ashen, the same color as his shirt and tights, which are loose-fitting and soiled. He is wearing blue shorts with small white polka dots. On his feet are sooty red boots. His legs dangle limply over her lap. His right arm is flung across his chest, his hand slightly tucked under his head.

The man is seated to the left of the woman. His head is turned slightly, and he is looking at the child. His eyes are wide and open, and there are tears in his eyes. His brow is furrowed, his mouth closed, and his lips turned downward. His clothes, in tones of blue-grey, are skintight; perhaps it’s a leotard. Gold sequins embellish his clothing. His bright-red hair is spiked and comes to a peak at the top of his head. The color of his skin matches the tones of his leotard. His arms have fallen loosely between his legs.
Practical Guide: Extending Art and About, Breathing Exercises, and Guided Visualization

Studies show that practicing systematic breathing, relaxation exercises and guided visualization are highly beneficial for individuals with dementia. Additional benefits extend to the caretakers, and, when practiced together, these exercises provide a relaxing and contemplative moment together.

How to extend the “Art and About” experience

- Determine which sculpture or painting would best suit these exercises and pair this with an Art Card that visitors take home. Choose works that are sizable, if possible, and have narrative or contemplative potential. The intention is that this activity can be repeated at home while viewing the Art Card image.
- During the social gathering before the tour, mention that, at the end of the tour, we will gather together for a closing moment.
- Decide which docent/guide will lead the exercises and which docent/guides will serve as support to remind groups of the gathering at the end of the tour, to guide visitors to the location, to help with seating etc.
- Visitors are encouraged to stand or sit together, whatever is most comfortable. Acknowledge that the tour is over but, before everyone returns to the busyness of their lives and day to day challenges, we will spend a few moments together in closing. Explain that we will all be joining in a relaxation exercise and that there is not a right or wrong way to do this. We will be guiding everyone along the way. If this activity makes anyone uncomfortable, they can stop at any time.

Breathing Exercises

- Ask everyone to find a comfortable standing or sitting position. For some this may be sitting with their hands resting on their knees, for others it may be standing with their arms and hands resting at their sides or perhaps holding the hand of their companion.
- Ask everyone to soften their gaze. Tell them they do this by gently relaxing their eyelids to where their eyes are only slightly open so that everything looks a bit hazy. Others may like to close their eyes completely if they feel they are in a stable standing or sitting position.
- Share that for the next few minutes we are only going to focus on the present, on this time together at the art museum. We are not going to think about the past or what tomorrow may bring.
- Explain that we are going to take three large breaths, and that you want them to follow your count as to when they take their breath in and when they let it out. Comment again that, if they have not done this before, not to worry about getting it right. Demonstrate it for them: breathe in on a count of three, hold your breath, breathe out for a count of three. Repeat this process three times with the visitors.
Guided Visualization

Ask everyone to remain in their comfortable position and follow along as you take them on a short journey while looking at the work in front of them, or they may want to keep their eyes relaxed. Let the visitors know that the Art Card they are taking home is the work we are viewing for this exercise.

Share your story. This should last for two to three minutes, whatever you’re comfortable with. Take your time, pace yourself, find a soothing tone of voice and create a gentle moment.

Ideas to create your Guided Visualization moment:

- Find a private calm space and make yourself comfortable.
- Take a few slow and deep breaths to center your attention and calm yourself.
- Close your eyes.
- Imagine yourself in a beautiful location, where everything is ideal.
- Some people visualize a beach, a mountain, a forest, or being in a favorite room sitting on a favorite chair.
- Imagine yourself becoming calm and relaxed. Alternatively, imagine yourself smiling, feeling happy and having a good time.
- Focus on the different sensory attributes present in your scene to make it more vivid in your mind. For instance, if you are imagining the beach, spend some time vividly imagining the warmth of the sun on your skin, the smell of the ocean, seaweed and salt spray, and the sound of the waves, wind and seagulls. The more you can evoke your senses, the more vivid the entire image will become.
- Remain within your scene, touring its various sensory aspects, for five to ten minutes or until you feel relaxed.
- While relaxed, assure yourself that you can return to this place whenever you want or need to relax.
- Open your eyes again and then rejoin your world.

Imagine we have left the hectic city behind and we find ourselves standing high on a knoll in the foothills, looking eastward. It's a cool, crisp morning. The sun is just peeking out, still only a sliver of reds, yellows and oranges streaking across the plains. We pull our jackets up around our ears.

We begin to walk down the hill. There's a dusting of snow with small impressions that let us know we're not the first to arrive. As we walk along, the prairie grass is heard crackling beneath our feet. It's bedded down for the winter.

The sun is arriving. It begins to warm our faces. Below, just coming into view, we see Argus, Lucky and Willy. The chill doesn't bother them as they nuzzle through the snow. They seem to have found a satisfying snack beneath the white blanket. Lucky raises his head, sensing our arrival, but he appears indifferent. He's far more interested in his breakfast.

The peace, the stillness of the morning, and the full measure of the sun is upon us. We stand together, perhaps hand in hand, breathing contentedly in this moment of togetherness. Soon we'll return to the busyness of our day, but as the day moves on, let's try to remember how we felt at this moment and our time together.
Let’s leave this hectic city behind and imagine we have found ourselves in a beautiful park, with picnic baskets in tow. Summer flowers are in full bloom, birds contentedly sing to one another, and squirrels are having a rousing game of chase. Scampering about, up the tree they go.

We have shared conversations about children and grandchildren, the horseshoe games are finished, and our picnic goodies are spread out on the blankets. Perhaps there are some taste treats from our childhood—deviled eggs, hotdogs, hamburgers and maybe a few brats. No tofu or veggie burgers here! Pass the catsup and mustard, please--oops! Someone forgot to bring the pickle relish. Coleslaw or your grandmother’s potato salad?

Lemonade, iced tea, cold beer or cooled white wine. Watermelon, brownies and homemade strawberry ice cream....quick! Eat it before it melts.

There are no cell phones or iPads in sight. We’ve enjoyed the ease of being with friends and new acquaintances. The sun is setting. It’s a glorious one, a fireball of crimson, yellows like ripe lemons and hints of pink and coral. Billowing clouds languish above. The pale blue sky is hueing down the palette of blues. Soon it will be all inky.

The days ahead will be filled challenges, decisions and the day-to-day busyness of life, but for the moment, we will take with us contented thoughts of our time together—a bit of peace, quietness and community.
Resources

- **Ann Cunningham** (Tactile artist art and teacher at the Colorado Center for the Blind:)
  *Sensational Black Boards.* $50 large, $30 small.
  ann@acunningham.com

- **Deborah B. Lewis:** President, Audio Descriptions Solutions
  deborahlewis@audiodescriptionsolutions.com
  www.audiodescriptionssolutions.com (providers of audio description training and services, including museums, theatres, National Park Visitor Centers and Historic Parks.) *The Three Core Skills-Do's and Don'ts for Verbal Description.*

- **Danielle Schulz:** DAM Manager of Adult and Access Programs
  (720) 913-0074
  dschulz@denverartmuseum.org

- **Anne Stellmon:** annestellmon@gmail.org

- **Robin Stolp:** robinstolp@comcast.net

- **Lindsey Miller Truswell:** DAM Coordinator of Adult and Access Programs
  (720) 913-0007
  ltruswell@denverartmuseum.org

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- **Alzheimer’s Association: Facts & Figures**
  Video
  [https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/facts-figures](https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/facts-figures)
  2019 Report

- **Autism Community Store**
  [https://www.autismcommunitystore.com](https://www.autismcommunitystore.com)

- **Institute of Museum and Library Services**
  [https://www.imls.gov/grants](https://www.imls.gov/grants)

- **Maintaining Accessibility in Museums**
  [www.ada.gov/business/museumaccess.htm](http://www.ada.gov/business/museumaccess.htm)

- **Jewish Museum**

- **Meet Me at MoMA**
  Many resources on this page, be sure to watch the video in upper right-hand corner
  [https://www.moma.org/visit/accessibility/meetme/](https://www.moma.org/visit/accessibility/meetme/)

- **Milwaukee Public Museum Spark! Programs**
  (see video at the bottom of the page)
  [http://www.mpm.edu/programs/spark](http://www.mpm.edu/programs/spark)
• Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibit Designs
  www.si.edu/Accessibility/SGAED


• YouTube Videos:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxHt_QYMg8E  Sensational Blackboard Basics (Ann Cunningham)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCjSegqG0ng  How to Experience Art Through Touch: Part 1 (Ann Cunningham)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qL3U2uylXtg  How to Experience Art Through Touch: Part 2 (Ann Cunningham)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ECbjK4Ra-Ys  What is Alzheimer’s Disease?
    Narrated by David Hyde Pierce