Module 1: Digital Accessibility & Inclusion
Webinar Series Review
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By Michelle Rekowski, Student Technology Fellow for the Museum Learning Hub, a cross-regional collaboration to provide free capacity-building training and resources, funded by a National Leadership Grant for Museums from IMLS.

Are you looking to make your museum's online presence more accessible? Do you feel alone in trying to convince your board members or coworkers of the importance of accessibility and inclusion? If you answered yes to either question, you need to check out Module 1 on Digital Accessibility and Inclusion for Museums. As the title suggests, this learning module provides resources and advice on how to create digital content that is accessible and inclusive for a variety of audiences. This is a crucial topic because although digital content is often touted for its accessibility, it can actually worsen the access gap for disabled people. The presenters address inclusive design practices for deaf, blind, and neurodivergent people. They provide practical examples from their work along with general advice for those of us just starting to bring inclusive practices to our institutions.

In the first session, Robin Marquis, Katy Menne, and Meredith Peruzzi discuss how they provide accessibility at their respective institutions. Marquis is the Accessibility Coordinator at The Peale in Baltimore, Maryland. They discuss the importance of making accessibility a priority for everyone by educating staff on accessibility, communicating accessibility accommodations with the public, and integrating accessibility into financial and strategic plans. Menne, the Curator of Education at the North Carolina Maritime Museum at Southport, shares how her museum became the first certified autism center in North Carolina. Peruzzi is the Director of the National Deaf Life Museum in Washington, DC. As a member of the deaf and hard-of-hearing community, she addresses the need to involve the groups you are working to include in the development of accessible programs and digital spaces.

Sina Bahram, President of Prime Access Consulting, and Corey Timpson of Corey Timpson Design discuss the basics to remember when undertaking an inclusive design project in the second session. Bahram provides definitions for some common terms that are necessary to understand when approaching accessible

design, like assistive technology. Timpson provides an overview of basic dos and don'ts for creating accessible websites and social media posts. In the third session [Anna Chiaretta Lavatelli](#), a Principle at Corey Timpson Design, gives an overview of how to produce accessible live streams and video content. The final session focuses on making digital collections accessible. Bahram and Timpson discuss various ways in which museums can improve the accessibility of both their in-gallery and online collections.

Something that was mentioned throughout these sessions was that accessible design benefits everyone. As an example, Peruzzi reminded us that captions are not only helpful for deaf people, but they make it easier for neurodiverse people and non-native English speakers who are watching. Corey Timpson shared how adding alternative text image descriptions to your website increases your search optimization. One statistic Timpson mentioned that I was unaware of is that 1 in 5 people have a disability. So not only is providing accessibility the ethical and lawful thing to do but there is a huge market. The focus should always be on improving the visitor's experience, but if you are having trouble convincing others at your institution to prioritize accessibility, these are just some ways you can frame discussions on accessibility and inclusion.

I thought Meredith Peruzzi's emphasis on seeing disabled people as individuals with unique needs was the single most important takeaway from this module. It is easy coming from an institutional perspective to view disabled communities as monolithic. That is not the reality. A crucial aspect of accessible design is acknowledging differences within the disabled community you are considering. There is no one-size-fits-all solution when providing accessibility. One example Peruzzi shared was that not all deaf or hard-of-hearing people use American sign language. With this in mind providing an ASL interpreter without live captioning can still exclude members of the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. That is why we need to ask what someone's needs are rather than assuming. They are the expert on their own needs. If a deaf person asks for an oral interpreter, it is our responsibility to honor this request if possible. I learned from Peruzzi's presentation that an oral interpreter is someone who can "re-communicate the spoken language through lip-reading." If you cannot find a qualified interpreter, choosing an alternative accommodation is acceptable. What matters is the effort put in even when there are limitations to the accommodations we can provide. Our goal is to meet each person where they are to the best of our abilities.

Making our programs and collections accessible to everyone is an imperative all museums must undertake, but accessible practices don't develop overnight. If I learned anything from this module, it was that improving our institutions is a process. Starting small by providing auto-generated captions is better than no captions at all. Using WAVE to check your website's accessibility is a fast way to identify glaring issues. As the presenters remind us, relying on automated systems to improve accessibility is not foolproof, but we all need to start somewhere.

Tools and Resources:

- [Coyote](#) - visual description
- [Cooper Hewitt](#) - guidelines for visual descriptions
- [Autism center certification](#)
- [Amara](#) - free captioning service
- [WAVE](#) - web page accessibility checker
- [WordPress](#) - website builder with accessibility features
- [Chrome Color Contrast Extension](#)
- Human transcription services: [Verbal Ink](#), [Rev](#), [Casting Words](#)
- Automated transcription: [Otter.ai](#), YouTube
- Live streaming services with interpreter feeds: Zoom, [Vimeo Studio](#), [OBS](#), [StreamYard](#)
    - Zoom allows multiple audio tracks for audio description or translations
- Learn about [CART](#) (Communication Access Realtime Translation) for human-made live captions
- Automated live streaming captions: [Otter.ai](#), [3PlayMedia](#), [Rev](#)