

Section 1

Building Careers in the Arts:

Resources for Artists, Cultural Workers, and Youth with Disabilities



Careers in the Arts Toolkit

Promoting Equity, Access, and Inclusion in the Arts for People with Disabilities

Credits

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Cover image: Dancer Sidiki Conde performing at the 2007 NEA National Heritage Fellowship concert. Photo by Michael G. Stewart

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A Note About Person- and Identity-First Language:

The National Endowment for the Arts and Art Beyond Sight recognize that there are multiple preferences for the terminology to use when referring to people with disabilities. Some individuals with disabilities prefer the use of person-first language (e.g., people who are blind), emphasizing the person over their disability. Others prefer identity-first language (e.g., disabled artist, blind person) because they view their disability as an integral part of who they are. Within this toolkit, you will find intentional uses of both person-first and identity-first language.

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Resources for Artists, Cultural Workers, and Youth with Disabilities

Do you enjoy expressing yourself through art or being around art and other artists? Do you wonder if you could maintain employment working in the arts? Are you interested in learning more about your options and potential career paths? This section of the toolkit is a great starting point.

Whether you're making art, managing its development and distribution, or working in a non-arts related job within an arts institution, the arts are where culture and creative expression intersect.

Disabled artists and other people with disabilities seeking careers in the arts will find a wide range of resources in this section of the toolkit.

In this section, you will find information on:

- Planning and preparing for a career in the arts
- Navigating job accommodations, disability benefits, and disability rights
- How to find jobs and other opportunities in the arts
- How to form a professional network with other artists
- Resources for youth

Why Pursue a Career in the Arts?

People pursue careers in the arts to express their creativity, to work with others and their community, and to bring attention to what is important to them or what they are passionate about. Many are drawn to the flexibility and variety an arts career offers.

When it comes to pursuing a career in the arts, people with disabilities can experience barriers to success—from inaccessible workspaces, to fluctuating job stability, to misconceptions about the skills, talents, and abilities that people with disabilities can bring to arts workplaces. However, the arts and culture field offers a rewarding and viable career path for many people with a range of disabilities. Just ask the numerous disabled people with disabilities who have flourished in arts careers as performers, visual artists, teaching artists, cultural workers, administrators, and more. [See examples of artist success stories.](#)

A Growing Career Field

Arts and culture jobs can be personally and professionally fulfilling—and they are viable and growing career fields for people with and without disabilities. Data from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) demonstrates the [economic impact of the arts](#), even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The arts contributed \$876.7 billion to the U.S. economy in 2020 (4.2 percent of the Gross Domestic Product) and counted 4.6 million workers. You can explore the salaries of different arts occupations in the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#).

“Even when the work we create isn’t about disability, Disabled artists bring all that we are—the art of improvisation, insights born from experience, and an outsider’s sense of empathy—to everything we do. By being 100% ourselves Disabled artists not only show the world a different way forward, we also lead by example, and give others permission to do the same.”

Lawrence Carter-Long
Co-Director, DisArt

Community, Creativity, and Collaboration

The arts thrive through collaboration, so when you choose a career in the arts as an artist or a cultural worker, you will be part of a vibrant community and growing career field whether it’s in school, in a studio or rehearsal space, or in an office.

People with disabilities are involved in every sector of the arts, and they have much to bring to the table. Many artists seek to create cultural change by producing new ideas through their work, and it's a chance to build a community of people with similar ideas. You get to use your mind, your problem-solving skills, and your creativity when working in the arts.

Varied Career Paths

There are many career paths for artists and creators—by which we mean anyone who invents, produces, or makes something. Some people aspire to have a dedicated career as a cultural worker; others work in cultural jobs while pursuing their career as an artist. Some artists are performers, and others are creators. In the Types of Arts Careers section of this toolkit, you can learn more about opportunities for artists and cultural workers.



Artist Gordon Sasaki. Photo courtesy of Gordon Sasaki

Arts Experiences and Training for Youth

No matter what career a young person aspires to have, some proven keys to success are exposure, career preparation, and work-based learning experiences prior to transitioning to the world of work.

This section of the toolkit is designed to help young people, their families, and other youth influencers, discover opportunities in the arts and culture field and forge vital arts connections for youth with disabilities. (Please Note: Educators will find more in-depth information on these topics in the [Resources for Arts Educators and Teaching Artists](#) section of the toolkit.)

Opportunities in the Arts

Youth with disabilities should know and understand that there are numerous job opportunities in the arts, and that they don't need to be an **arts creator** or **performer** to work in the field. They can also be a **cultural worker** or **arts administrator** who works behind the scenes or supports the makers of art.

To see the wide array of opportunities that exist in the arts, explore the [Types of Arts Careers](#) section to learn more about opportunities for artists and cultural workers.

General Guidance for Family and Educators

Children dream about future careers in the most imaginative ways, often with the phrase “when I grow up, I want to be ____.” To help them explore these dreams, they need exposure to the array of arts careers and support and guidance from family members, teachers, mentors, coaches, and other youth influencers.

Point Out Role Models in the Arts Field

By showing children with disabilities that there are successful artists and cultural workers with disabilities in the workforce, they will be able to identify themselves with

“Follow your dream and don't let society tell you that you can't do or be whatever role you want to be... Just because you don't see someone in the role you want now doesn't mean that job is not for you. It might mean that you need to be the first. I feel that life is about accommodations for everyone so there's always a way to make something happen.”

Jenn Poret
Client Services Manager, Hammer Theatre Center

those artistic practices and careers. Teachers and parents should seek opportunities to take children to performances, shows, workshops, etc., that feature artists with disabilities, and to point out the variety of careers within the setting. This illustrates that there is a place for them in the arts, and they may choose to begin a path for their own future.

Take Note of Arts Interests and Seek Out Experiences

In their search for artistic self-determination and work opportunities, all children, including youth with disabilities, often need allies and family members to help them explore their preferences. So, when thinking about exposing youth to early arts experiences, take note of your child's skills and interests. Do they love drawing, painting, or building? Do they like performing? Music and dance? Graphic design or making videos?

A good early step is to acquaint yourself with existing artistic training and adaptive resources. This will enable you to be a better advocate for your aspiring artist with a disability. In addition, knowing where to guide teachers to resources and adaptive arts-centric tools will help inform educators' understanding of inclusion, education, and empowerment of their students with disabilities.

Another tip is to access the [Guideposts for Success 2.0](#), which is designed to put your child's goals into action. Developed by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), it outlines key educational and career development interventions that make a positive difference in the lives of all youth, including youth with disabilities.

"This award is for every kid who is watching tonight who has a disability, who has a limitation or a challenge, who has been waiting to see themselves represented in this arena."

Ali Stroker
Actress, upon receiving the Tony Award for Best Featured Actress in a Musical

Connecting Young People to Arts Experiences

There are many opportunities for young people with disabilities to have arts experiences and valuable hands-on training throughout their school years—experiences that can spark a love of arts and culture and a desire to pursue a professional arts career later in life. This can be especially important during high school. Read on to learn how to connect with arts experiences and prepare yourself for an enriching arts and culture career.

School Experiences

Families should assess whether the student is receiving adequate arts experiences in school and talk to their teachers about opportunities to cultivate their artistic side. Students should be involved in these discussions from the beginning, which is crucial to long-term success. If your student has an [Individualized Learning Plan \(ILP\)](#), an [Individualized Education Program \(IEP\)](#), or a [504 plan](#), speak with their counselor about incorporating arts experiences into it. Examples range from school-based music and art classes to camps and extracurricular activities.

Young people with a focused interest in a particular art form can build a portfolio and history of arts experiences to apply to competitive arts high schools and training. Explore whether your school offers after-school enrichment classes in arts-related subjects that you enjoy. Take advantage of your arts interest and develop your talents through arts and culture experiences.

- Begin by seeking out in-school arts experiences. Does your school have a theater program, band/orchestra, choir, or art club? Can you write for a publication, work on the school newspaper layout, or take photos for the yearbook?
- Engage your teachers. Teachers and school curricula should strive to make the arts readily accessible with adequate experiences. If you feel that you need more support or resources, talk to your teachers about additional opportunities.
- Ask teachers about art-related competitions you might enter, and research them yourself.
- Take advantage of after-school enrichment classes in arts-related subjects that might be available to you. Examples range from school-based music and art classes to camps and extracurricular activities.
- Explore the questions in the [Guideposts for Success 2.0 tool](#) and share your answers with a mentor. Learn ways to put your goals into action.

If your local schools or camps need help in becoming disability-inclusive, point them to resources in the [Resources for Arts Educators](#) section of this toolkit. Also, [know your rights](#) to advocate for yourself or your child about inclusive programming.

Community Experiences

Outside of school, families should consider opportunities to introduce their child to people who work in the arts, whether they be family members, neighbors, or other people in the community. As a family, attend local arts

programs of interest to your child such as plays, musical performances, museums, or other cultural events, and discuss the experience in the context of potential career opportunities.

Youth should never pass up an opportunity to attend a local arts program of interest, connect with potential mentors and teachers, or pursue job training experiences.



Production of the musical *Annie* by Phamaly Theatre. Photo by the Phamaly Theatre

Get out and experience **local arts events and institutions**, from music and theater performances to museums and galleries. In fact, you might be able to suggest arts-related field trips or family outings to teachers or other adults.

- Seek out **mentors, teachers, and informational interviews**. Take the opportunity to speak with cultural workers and artists about their experience in the context of potential career opportunities. Consider people in your network who work in the arts and may be able to provide guidance or even mentoring to help you explore. These could be family members, neighbors, or other adults in your community. Keep in mind that you may need to reach out beyond your family if the arts are not what they know. Teachers, cultural organization professionals, and art schools can all be helpful to you.
- Pursue **arts internships and part-time jobs**, which can be key for young people who want to become artists or cultural workers. You might work in an art gallery, a theater, an art supply store, or a cultural institution, to name a few options. In the arts and culture field, it's common practice to offer unpaid and paid internships and fellowships. So be on the lookout—particularly for jobs and internships interested in providing experiences to youth and teens with disabilities.

Summer Experiences

Summer is a great time to enrich kids' lives with arts experiences. Research camps and after school programs and speak with them about your child's needs. You can start with local dance and music schools, community theaters, and cultural institutions. Your city or county may also offer classes through their division of parks and recreation.

Summer can be an optimal time for youth to make arts and culture connections.

- Research **area camps** and **after school programs** and speak with them about your needs. Sources to investigate include local dance and music schools, community theaters, and cultural institutions. Your city or county may also offer classes through their division of parks and recreation.
- Seek out **young professional “junior company” training** held by professional dance companies, theater companies, universities and colleges, etc., and consider auditioning for young-professional and/or community performing groups.
- Seek out **internships, mentorships, fellowships, residencies, and apprenticeships** in the arts. The [Artist Communities Alliance](#) features some helpful directories.

Tip: If your local schools or camps need assistance in becoming disability-inclusive, point them to resources in the [Resources for Arts Educators](#) section of this toolkit. And don't forget to [know your rights](#) when advocating for yourself about inclusive programming.

Tip: High schoolers should remember to document their high school artmaking by building a portfolio or resume of experiences that they can use to apply to competitive arts high schools and colleges.

Knowing What You Need to Succeed

Developing your own creative talents and fine-tuning interests in the arts comes with practice, dedication, and support. Allies and supportive people can be teachers, family members, or friends who encourage your artistic passions. For teens with disabilities, the assistance of educators and other career influencers to youth works best when all parties are aware of and adhere to their roles. The role of supportive persons is not to interpret the disabled artist's creative vision, but rather to support learning and the execution of your craft.

Accommodations and Adaptive Tools

When fine-tuning your craft or when thinking ahead to a career in the arts, it's important to know what you need to successfully perform tasks



Performing artist Lachi.
Photo courtesy of Lachi Music LLC

"I believe the greatest hurdle for artists with disabilities is breaking free of the deep-rooted negative stigmas others surround you with, and that you in turn put on yourself. The truth is, those able to problem solve in creative ways—to cross a street without walking, cook a meal without seeing, tell a joke without speaking, and graduate without reading—they are the ones who've developed that muscle of creative thinking far beyond that of the average human. Disabled people are creative beefcakes! You only live once, so do what you're good at and get so good at it that no one can deny you. Create."

Lachi
Artist, Songwriter,
and Author

and duties. There are many resources and online videos that can help you learn about adaptive methods and educate supportive people in your life. Such methods and tools are designed to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of people with disabilities.

Accommodations and adaptive tools range in functionality. They include everything from physical assistance with materials to assistive technology (AT) devices. Examples of accommodations and AT that apply to arts jobs include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Powered dance chairs
- Pencil grips
- Magnification devices
- Adaptive switches
- Adaptive equipment (e.g., scissors, paint brushes, battery-operated devices, extenders, speech-to-text software, computerized painting and drawing software, slant boards to help with range of motion, stamps and stickers for illustrations, use of symbols to replace words, and color-coded sheet music)

Learn more about accommodations in the [Job Accommodations and Accessibility for Artists and Cultural Workers](#) section of the toolkit.

Transition from School to Post-Secondary Experiences

The process of transitioning from the supportive environment to college, job training programs, or to work can be challenging but there are resources, programs, and services that can help you with this process. Check out these [youth transition resources](#) from the U.S. Department of Labor and the resources in the Where to Learn More box below and read the section below on post-secondary arts education.

The bottom line is to empower yourself by learning what you need to succeed in the workplace and how to self-advocate. In addition, be sure to share the information in this toolkit with teachers and other supportive people in your life to enhance their understanding of inclusion and to help them empower all youth with disabilities.

Where to Learn More:

- [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#)
- [Individual Learning Plan Policies by State](#)
- [Individual Learning Plan Checklist](#)
- [Individual Learning Plan Tips](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions About Section 504 and the Education of Children with Disabilities](#)
- [Parent and Educator Resource Guide to Section 504 in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools](#)
- [Center for Parent Information and Resources](#)
- [Partners for Youth with Disabilities](#)
- [National Disability Mentoring Coalition](#)

Post-Secondary Arts Education and Training

No matter what career a person aspires to, some proven keys to success are career preparation and work-based learning experiences prior to transitioning to the world of work.

For many aspiring artists and cultural workers, high school is followed by some form of post-secondary education or specialized job training. Examples include art school, an arts internship or apprenticeship program, junior performing company, conservatory, or arts and culture-related studies at a college or university. Often, as cultural careers are highly competitive, some young people choose to gain skills they will need in non-arts related fields and then transition to their hoped-for arts career.

Finding a College or Arts Education/Training Program

From internet research to working with a school guidance counselor, there are countless ways to explore arts-focused educational opportunities after high school. Two centralized resources are [Arts-Accredit](#), which offers a searchable database of accredited art schools in various disciplines, and the [Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design](#).

Another key resource may be your state vocational rehabilitation agency (VR). State and local VR counselors are available to help transitioning students with disabilities determine their career goals and chart a path toward achieving them. Post-secondary education and/or vocational training is often recommended, so VR counselors can steer students toward that education and investigate ways to defray the costs.

Choosing the Right Program

As with any post-secondary education decision, there are many things to consider when choosing a school or educational/training program.

- Distance from home
- Tuition cost/financial aid options
- Quality of the arts department/curriculum
- Quality of professors/instructors
- School size
- Admission rate
- Graduation rate
- First-year retention rate

- Student to faculty ratio
- Graduate/professional school options
- Employment rates of graduates

Further, if you have a disability that requires specific accommodations, such as those related to disability, consider those needs and research how well your prospective school can meet them. A great place to start is a school's disability student services office. You can also check out this [College Guide for Students with Disabilities](#) or these [College Resources for Students with Disabilities](#).

The U.S. Department of Education also offers [guidance on the rights and responsibilities of students with disabilities who are preparing for post-secondary education](#). [Think College](#) is a resource that can help prepare students with intellectual disabilities for higher education.

Remember that, for students with disabilities, the requirement for a free and appropriate public education, including the development and implementation of an IEP, ends at the point of high school graduation. If you're a person with a disability pursuing entrance to institutions of higher education, it is important for you to know that most colleges and universities are required by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and Title II or Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act to provide students with disabilities with appropriate academic adjustments and auxiliary aids and services that are necessary to afford you an equal opportunity to take part in the school's program. An example of an academic adjustment is extra time to take a test. Examples of auxiliary aids include note takers, interpreters, readers, and specialized computer equipment. The Department of Education offers [more information on this topic](#).

Ways to Save for Your Arts Education or Professional Training Program

In addition to traditional and varied scholarships and financial aid programs, students with disabilities may be eligible for the following savings programs:

- [Achieving a Better Life Experience \(ABLE\) Accounts](#): For individuals with disabilities and their families can help fund disability-related living expenses. The beneficiary of the account is the account owner, and income earned from the accounts will not be taxed. ABLE savings can be used to fund education, housing, transportation, employment training and support, assistive technology, personal support services, health care expenses, financial management and administrative services, and other expenses which help improve health, independence, and/or quality of life.

- [Special Needs Trusts](#): Special needs trusts enable family members to transfer savings to their children with disabilities without jeopardizing their ability to receive government benefits. Each state has a different set of limitations on how money in special needs trusts can or can't be used, but generally it can be used for supplemental needs such as education.
- [Plan to Achieve Self-Support \(PASS\)](#) These SSI work incentives let you use your own income or assets to help you reach your work goals. For example, you could set aside money to go to school to get specialized training for a job or to start a business. A plan is meant to help you get items, services, or skills you need to reach your goals.



"It's important to find a career that you love. Starting out, you may not know what you want or it might not be as challenging to your creative side, but that's OK. Research professions. Don't be shy about contacting someone that does what YOU want to do and ask for an informational interview. Find your community."

James LeBrecht
Film and Theater
Sound Designer and Filmmaker

Filmmaker and Oscar award nominee James LeBrecht.
 Photo by B. Douglas Jensen

Internships and Other Special Training and Experiential Opportunities

The best way to learn more about your career interests is to experience the field firsthand through internships and other practical training opportunities. Many involve a competitive application process while others can be landed through traditional networking. Whatever the case, people in your chosen field will give you high marks for internships and other training experiences on your resume. Such experiences can expose you to the inner workings of the industry you're interested in. They can also help you build a new community with like-minded people who share your goals and interests.

Another best practice is to seek out professionals in your field of interest who can serve as mentors and connect you to internships or fellowships. Valuable resources include the [National Disability Mentoring Coalition](#) or [Mentoring - Partners for Youth with Disabilities](#).

Where to Learn More:

- [National Center for College Students with Disabilities](#)
- [Association of University Centers on Disabilities](#)
- [Arts-Accredit's List of Accredited Visual and Performing Arts Schools](#)
- [The Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design](#)
- [National Arts and Disability Center](#)
- [College Funding for Students with Disabilities](#)
- [Career Resources for Students with Disabilities](#)

Finding a Job in the Arts

When you are ready to transition to work, there are many resources available to help people with disabilities find jobs and artistic opportunities.

Note: For guidance on work benefits and the vocational rehabilitation system, visit the [Navigating Work and Disability Benefits](#) section of the toolkit.

Job Search Resources

Numerous resources are available to help aspiring artists and cultural workers with disabilities.

- **Teachers and Counselors:** High school and college students can begin by talking to teachers, guidance counselors, and Disability Student Services Coordinators to learn about job training and work-based learning experiences.
- **Mentors, Internships, and Fellowships:** Seek out professionals in your field of interest who can serve as mentors, as well as internships or fellowships that can offer you valuable work experience to build your resume. Valuable resources include the [National Disability Mentoring Coalition](#).
- **Online Job Boards:** Post your resume on key job boards. The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion offers a [list of online job posting boards](#) popular with people with disabilities. In addition, many arts service organizations host job boards. Examples include the [Americans for the Arts Job Bank](#), the [American Alliance of Museums career resources](#) web page, the [League of American Orchestras Jobs Center](#), the [New York Foundation for the Arts job board](#), and the [Art Jobs](#) job board.
- **State Arts Agencies and Regional Arts Organizations:** Each U.S. state and territory has a [state arts agency](#) that promotes the arts and supports artists and arts organizations through grant funding. In addition, [six regional arts organizations](#), each representing a geographic grouping of states, also support arts organizations within their region. Many of these agencies and organizations offer employment information and resources to support artists and job seekers in the arts.
- **Local Arts Agencies:** Check with your [city or county arts agency](#) to see if they have job boards or other employment resources.
- **American Job Centers:** Your local American Job Center has lists of recent job openings, computers you can use to search for jobs, and career counselors who can help you find jobs and training and write your resume. Visit the [American Job Center website](#) or call 1-877-348-0502 or TTY: 1-877-348-0501 to find an American Job Center near you.

- **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Agencies:** [VR agencies](#) provide career counseling, job training, and job placement services for people with disabilities. Contact your state's [VR agency](#) for more information.
- **State Departments of Labor:** Contact [your state](#) Department of Labor to find out how they can help you with your job search.
- **State Governors' Offices on Employment of People with Disabilities:** [Governors' Committees](#) can often connect you to state and local organizations that provide job training or help with your job search.
- **Independent Living Centers (ILC):** Your [local ILC](#) may provide job coaching, training, and other services. ILCs can also help you develop skills to live independently, and they often have information about employers in your area who are interested in hiring people with disabilities.
- **Apprenticeship Programs:** [State Apprenticeship Agencies](#) can help connect job seekers looking to learn new skills with employers and sponsors looking for qualified workers, including those with disabilities.
- **Disability Arts/Inclusive/Integrated Arts Organizations:** The [VSA International Network](#) can help connect you with inclusive and integrated arts organizations.

Working for the Federal Government

From the Smithsonian Institution to the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for Humanities, many agencies in the federal government offer enriching arts-related job opportunities. In fact, almost all agencies employ graphic designers, web designers, photographers, writers, and editors to help them conduct business, connect with the public, and document their work.

While federal agencies can fill jobs the traditional way, they can also use the Schedule A Hiring Authority to recruit and hire qualified candidates with disabilities to meet hiring goals, often bypassing the typical hiring process. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) explains that job seekers with disabilities may apply for jobs either way. You are eligible for a "Schedule A" appointment if you are a person with an intellectual disability, a severe physical disability, or a psychiatric disability and meet the job's qualifications.

You can also consider applying to the [Workforce Recruitment Program](#), which connects post-secondary students and recent graduates with disabilities to positions in the federal government. For more details on federal employment, read [The ABCs of Schedule A](#), and check out the following resources from [USA Jobs](#) and [the Office of Personnel Management](#).

Self-Employment and Entrepreneurship

Artists are often entrepreneurs, freelancers, or consultants, and many people with disabilities choose to start their own business or work as a self-employed artist. This type of entrepreneurship offers one the flexibility to set the terms of their employment, determine their own work schedules, and set up their home or office with the specific accommodations they may need. In 2021, [19.1 percent of people with a disability were employed and 9.1 percent of those were self-employed \(The Economics Daily: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics\)](#). The U.S. Department of Labor has additional resources on self-employment for people with disabilities.

Other key links include the Small Business Administration's (SBA) [8\(a\) Business Development](#) and [SCORE](#) programs, and [entrepreneurship resources from the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work program](#).

Additional resources include the following:

- [A Summary Guide to Employment Supports for Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [SSI Spotlight on Income from the Arts \(ssa.gov\)](#)
- [Modified Adjusted Gross Income for Medicaid eligibility](#)
- [Artists Health Insurance Resource Center](#)
- [The Artists Safety Net](#)
- [Youth Entrepreneurship Guide](#)

"Don't embark on a career in the arts to be the next Picasso, Van Gogh, or Kuntz. Embark on the journey because it's something you love. Take business/ entrepreneurship classes. Being an artist is also being in business for yourself. It is important to have a solid skillset in both your craft and business acumen in order to succeed. There are no overnight successes. Being an artist/teaching artist/art teacher takes dedication, hard work, and lots of time invested. Most overnight successes are dozens of years in the making."

Shawna N.M. Barnes
Ceramic Sculptor, Graphic Designer,
Accessible Website Designer, Veteran

Where to Learn More:

- [Campaign for Disability Employment – Resources for Employees and Job Seekers](#)
- [American Job Center Website](#)
- [State Apprenticeship Agencies](#)



Gaelynn Lea, violinist and vocalist, musician, composer, public speaker, and disability advocate. Photo by Paul Vinneau

Networking, Interviewing, and Showcasing Your Work

When seeking a position in any field, there are several best practices related to networking, resume preparation, and interviewing for jobs. While these standard practices generally extend to the arts field, there are some additional tools and practices to consider when it comes to branding yourself as an artist and showcasing your work. You have the right to ask for an accommodation at any stage of the job process, including during the application process, for an interview, and at any time before or after you accept a job. Learn more about disclosing a disability in the [Disability Identity and Disclosure Considerations](#) section and about accommodations in the [Job Accommodations and Accessibility for Artists and Cultural Workers](#) section of the toolkit.

Networking and Marketing Yourself as an Artist

In many cases, finding and securing a job means making personal connections with professionals in your field. Often, those connections may be right under your nose, so ask around and put yourself out there.

- Ask your teachers, friends, family members, and neighbors whether they know of anyone who works in the field you're pursuing.
- Call local artists or cultural workers and request an informational interview so that you can learn more about opportunities in their line of work.
- Attend local arts events so that you can mix, mingle, and seek out mentors and internships.
- Attend job fairs, use your school career counselors, and explore online job boards and networking sites.
- Attend industry conferences such as Dance/USA, Americans for the Arts, American Alliance of Museums (AAM), Association of Performing Arts Professionals (APAP), Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE), The Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF), and more.
- Join industry associations such as the ones listed above. Many have student or individual membership rates.

Tip: Having a printed business card ready with your name, contact information, social media handle, and (desired) professional field is always a good idea when networking—in addition to one or more of the supplemental materials described in the next section, as appropriate.

Portfolios, Reels, and Other Supplemental Artist Materials

Depending upon your medium or specialty, there are materials that can help you highlight samples of your work—tools that can complement a traditional resume and cover letter and bring your artistic talents to life. Such materials usually precede or accompany you to an initial meeting with a prospective employer or client. Examples include:

Portfolios

A portfolio is an edited collection of one's artwork that highlights the artist's vision, style, media, methods, and quality. While portfolios were, historically, printed out and compiled into a book, online portfolios are gaining in popularity. An Internet search on "[How to Create a Portfolio](#)" will generate scores of articles, videos, and how-to advice on the subject.

Artists Statements

Designed to offer the viewer context and understanding, an artist statement is a written description of an artist's work. Similar "artist statements" are often used during the art school admissions process or during job interviews. The School of the Art Institute of Chicago offers [a helpful guide to artist statements](#).

Headshots and Performer Resumes

Headshots are professional photographs—typically sized 8" x 10"—that clearly show an actor or performer's image. They are important leave-behinds following live auditions, and usually include the performer's resume adhered to the back. While an increasing industry trend for actors is to not include personally identifying information on resumes, many performer resumes tend to include training and performance experience, along with contact information and general physical characteristics (e.g., hair and eye color, self-identification of disability). That said, many audience-facing performers tend to leave off personal information such as their home address, personal phone number, and email due to privacy reasons. The New York Film Academy offers [tips on acing your headshot session](#), while the Broadway Artists Alliance shares [sample headshots and resumes](#).

Reels and Video Portfolios

Many performers also prepare edited "reels" featuring clips of themselves performing. You can duplicate these on labeled DVDs or on computer flash drives and share them as a leave-behind following an audition, or during networking opportunities. Remember to make any videos accessible through open captioning and/or audio description.

The key to preparing any arts and culture application or interview package is to showcase your best work, be clear and concise, and show who you are as an artist.

The Vermont Arts Council has developed a set of helpful [Digital Programming Technical Assistance webinars](#) on video creation, websites, online marketing, legal considerations, digital access for inclusion of disabled people, and more.

Resumes and Cover Letters

Traditional resumes and cover letters are recruitment tools requested by nearly every employer, no matter what the industry. A concise, well-written, grammatically correct resume is your chance to showcase your job skills, educational background, past achievements, and experience for potential employers. Access the following resources to find resume templates, tips, and best practices:

- [CareerOneStop](#)
- [GetMyFuture](#)

Unless otherwise requested, be sure to include a tailored cover letter with your resume when applying for a job. Cover letters offer you the chance to elaborate on your past achievements and “sell” yourself in a more in-depth way. The CareerOneStop website recommends that you structure your cover letter around four key sections: the heading/greeting, the opening/introduction, the body of the letter, and an assertive closing. Review its [guidance on cover letters](#), and download a [sample template](#). Career centers at your college or university can also provide information and feedback on your cover letter and resume.

Interviews, Auditions, and Follow-Up

Great resumes and cover letters can lead to fruitful job interviews. Are you prepared? The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) offers some helpful [interview tips for people with disabilities](#).

For many people with disabilities, the most stressful part of a job interview is deciding how much to say about their disability. It’s important for applicants to know they do not have to disclose their disability at any time, including during the interview process. Also, per federal law, potential employers are never allowed to *ask* about the nature of your disability, directly or indirectly, at any time, but particularly during the interview process. Disclosing a disability is a personal choice that you can read more about in the following publications:

- [Disability Disclosure \(Job Accommodation Network\)](#)
- [Disability Disclosure and Interviewing Techniques for Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [Youth, Disclosure, and the Workplace \(U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy\)](#)
- [Job Applicants and the Americans with Disabilities Act \(U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission\)](#)
- [The 411 on Disability Disclosure for Youth](#)

Following an interview, remember to collect the business card or contact information of the person(s) you met with and send a thoughtful **thank you note** via email or by mail immediately after your meeting. JAN recommends conducting a self-evaluation following every interview. Ask yourself how you performed and look for ways you can better prepare for your next opportunity.

Auditions

For performing artists, job interviews often take the form of live auditions. It's important to bring copies of your professional headshot to an audition with a copy of your resume stapled or glued to the back (facing outward).

If you need reasonable accommodations to take part in the live audition process, be sure to inform the stage manager or person in charge of the audition. Employers are required to provide reasonable accommodation(s) to individuals who request them. However, if you are not asked about your access needs, be sure to make them known. Learn more in the [Artist Accommodations and Access Statements](#) section of this toolkit.

Remember that auditions can keep performers waiting for a long time. Be sure to bring a "survival kit" of bottled water, snacks, reading materials, and pens and highlighters in case you need to take notes.

Social Media and Maintaining an Active Online Presence

In today's job market, many are finding new, modern ways to network, job hunt, and promote themselves. For example, instead of handing out traditional business cards and resumes, some are exclusively relying on web-based media and directing prospective employers to their online presence. This can be especially helpful to artists and performers who can maintain personalized websites and social media platforms featuring portfolio images, videos, artist statements, bios, and more. In fact, many artists and performers with and without disabilities have been discovered through online videos and social media posts that have gone viral.

Many online platforms are free or inexpensive to access, making them a cost-effective way to bring your talents to the masses. For tips, conduct a web search for “online marketing for artists” or “social media tips for artists.” You’ll find many articles and videos on ways to promote yourself online. In addition, the information technology (IT) departments in many schools may be able to assist you in tapping the power of online media. Some helpful resources include the following:

- [Best Practices for a Successful Social Media Presence](#)
- [Guide to Online Artwork Marketing for Artists](#)
- [Social Media Strategies for Craft Artists | American Craft Council](#)
- [Top Social Media Platforms for Artists \(fracturedatlas.org\)](#)

Remember: When posting images, videos, performances, and musical pieces, be sure to keep copyright protections in mind. You may need permission to post certain content.

Artist Residencies, Fellowships, Scholarships, and Travel Funding

Depending on your art field and goals, there are opportunities designed to help you gain immersive arts experiences and/or fund your artistic journey. Read on to learn more about them.

Artist Residencies and Communities

Artist-in-residence programs can be valuable professional opportunities for makers of art. They typically involve a competitive application process that results in an artist living and working on the premises of a larger organization so that they may hone their craft and produce work in a reflective, inspiring environment. There are some residencies geared specifically toward disabled artists (such as the Anderson Center Deaf Artist Residency) while others are more general. The Artist Communities Alliance features some helpful directories including a listing of artist residencies that provides information on their level of physical accessibility. Given that many artist residencies are held in remote areas, older buildings, and natural settings, residency participants must communicate their access accommodation needs to the residency organizers, including accessible studio/exhibition space, sleeping facilities, shower/bathroom facilities, or dining facilities.

[NEA blog: A Residency of One's Own: A Look at 3Arts Residency for Artists with Disabilities](#)

[NEA Blog: Spotlight on the Anderson Center Deaf Artist Residency](#)

Prizes and Awards

A great way to win recognition and validation for your work is to apply for artistic awards and prizes. In addition to raising awareness of your work, such awards can lead to networking opportunities and new connections, and some even come with funding to help jumpstart your arts career. Awards can also be excellent resume builders, marking the beginning of your track record as an artist in your chosen field.

Scholarships, Fellowships, and Travel Funding

Financial support can be key to achieving your educational and career goals, so many emerging artists and cultural workers pursue scholarships and fellowships. Such opportunities can enable you to pursue vocational, college, or graduate education, and fund your living expenses. Scholarships

and fellowships can be need-based or merit-based. Some are even focused on diversifying the staff of cultural institutions. Landing a scholarship or fellowship can be key to helping you meet financial goals while building a network of professionals who can assist you in your professional growth.



NEA Big Read Author Rebecca Taussig. Photo by Micah Jones

Job Accommodations and Accessibility for Artists and Cultural Workers

For people with disabilities, part of being a successful professional means knowing what you need to access your workplace successfully and thrive on the job. This section of the toolkit explores the ins and outs of workplace accommodations and productivity enhancements that can help artists and cultural workers do their job. In addition, it discusses key accessibility considerations for people with disabilities and ways to ensure that arts workplaces and institutions are accessible to all.

Why Are These Issues Important?

Building your knowledge base on accommodations, accessibility, and workplace inclusion can pay off on multiple levels. As arts institutions strive to include disability in their equity initiatives, being knowledgeable about such issues can make you an especially valuable job candidate. By lending your unique perspective and expertise, you can help yourself, potential arts employers, and future employees and patrons of arts organizations.

Understanding Job Accommodations

[Job accommodations](#) are workplace adjustments that can help people with disabilities perform certain job tasks. They are sometimes called “productivity enhancements,” and many are simple and inexpensive to implement.

Employers covered by the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) (ADA) or other disability nondiscrimination laws are required to provide reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. However, it is the applicant’s or employee’s responsibility to request an accommodation, at which time the employer must provide the accommodation or engage in an interactive process to determine the best solution.

[The Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\)](#) is the leading source of free, expert, and confidential guidance about workplace accommodations and disability employment issues, including employment laws and regulations. JAN’s experts can offer you one-on-one consultation on job accommodations and workplace supports that can help you succeed on the job.

- Browse JAN’s [Searchable Online Accommodation Resource \(SOAR\)](#).
- Find information on [reasonable accommodations and the ADA](#).
- Talk confidentially with an expert. Call 1-800-526-7234 (TTY: 1-877-781-9403)

Job Accommodations for Cultural Workers

For cultural workers, examples of accommodations include, but are not limited to:

- Adjustable desks for employees who use wheelchairs
- Screen reading software for employees with vision disabilities
- Job coaching for employees with intellectual disabilities
- Telecommuting and flexible work schedules
- ASL interpretation for people who are deaf or hard of hearing

Job Accommodations for Artists or Performers

For artists and performers, examples of accommodations include, but are not limited to:

- Accessible, affordable studio spaces for disabled artists, actors, dancers, and musicians
- Powered dance chairs
- Pencil grips
- Magnification devices
- Adaptive switches
- Adaptive equipment (e.g., scissors, paint brushes, battery-operated devices, extenders, speech to text software, computerized painting and drawing software, slant boards to help with range of motion, stamps and stickers for illustrations, use of symbols to replace words, and color-coded sheet music)
- Sign language interpreters or captioned videos for auditions, rehearsals, and work on set
- Allowing time for blind or low-vision actors to familiarize themselves with the layout of the rehearsal room, stage, and set prior to beginning work

Some accommodations are readily achievable, some may require time and money, and some may not be possible. It is important to educate producers to consider access and inclusion when choosing their production's venue, to know what is possible, to strategize with a network of like-minded artists, and to know your rights. Being your own self-advocate will help you do your best work.

Artist Accommodations and Access Statements

Many disabled artists write an *access statement* to foster better communication. An access statement is a document that one creates for

their employer. This document outlines the person's disability access needs in order for them to have equal access to work.

If you need reasonable accommodation to take part in the live audition process, for example, inform the stage manager or person in charge of the audition. The requirement is to provide reasonable accommodation(s) only to an individual who has previously informed the employer of their disability. It is your responsibility to inform the stage manager or person in charge of the audition that an accommodation is needed.

For visual artists, transporting your work to the exhibition space, maintaining timelines for exhibitions, or submitting applications for funding may be a challenge. It may be possible to ask for assistance with transportation or negotiate the costs into your contract.

Accessible Art Spaces

For disabled artists, it can often be challenging to find accessible performance, studio, and rehearsal space.

Artists rely on space to perform, exhibit, work, and study, and the physical accessibility of these spaces is necessary for many artists with disabilities. Many buildings, studios, schools, and universities have not made their spaces and programs accessible, but this is changing as disabled people are being recognized in the arts to a greater extent than ever before. Once spaces become accessible to disabled artists, they are able to attract a more diverse audience, including people with disabilities. It is important to know there are laws in place to ensure that public buildings and private entities open to the public are complying with accessibility requirements.

Of course, to get the needed accessible workspace or accommodation you must ask for it. A helpful starting point is JAN's [Employees' Practical Guide to Requesting and Negotiating Reasonable Accommodations Under the Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#), which includes guidance on negotiating with employers.

Integrated Techniques

In different art disciplines—studio art, dance, writing, film, etc.—there are varying terms that describe integrated arts and adaptive techniques. For instance, integrated dance can mean having both disabled and non-disabled dancers perform together with techniques that are adapted for disabled dancers to be able to do. It can also mean that there are wheelchairs or other devices built for disabled dancers specifically to enable creative movement. In music, an integrated technique can include making

braille music notations available for musicians who are blind or have low vision. In studio art, this can mean providing options for tools to use for painting other than paint brushes if they are difficult to manage. Integrated techniques for disability constraints can be guides for creative play for both disabled and non-disabled artists alike.

Explore the following resources for integrated techniques in various arts disciplines.

- [Mouth and Foot Painting Artists \(MFPA\)](#)
- [NFB Braille Music Resources](#)

Transportation Considerations for People with Disabilities

For people with disabilities, accessible transportation can be a crucial employment support. After all, you can't succeed at work if you can't *get* to work. From adapted vehicles to ride-sharing to public transportation, there are many transportation options and solutions for people with disabilities, but they vary based on your location.

A common option in many cities is **demand-response transportation (DRT)**. Sometimes called paratransit or "dial-a-ride," DRT is usually a service of your local transit agency. People with disabilities call to request a ride, and an accessible vehicle is dispatched to pick you up and bring you to your location free of charge. The National Aging and Disability Transportation Center offers a helpful [fact sheet on accessing DRT](#).

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) also offers [transportation-related links](#) on accessibility policy and resources for travelers with disabilities.

DOT is working closely with the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) on a number of transportation-related initiatives, including the accessibility of self-driving cars and employer strategies for connecting workers to accessible transportation. Visit [ODEP's webpage on accessible transportation](#) for more background and resources on this issue.

(Note: Employers play a key role on this front as well. Be sure to talk with your employer or prospective employer about your transportation needs, and the employer's transportation benefits/offerings. You can direct them to the [Transportation Considerations for Employers](#) section of the toolkit.)

Often, the key to tackling transportation barriers and ensuring access for all is collaboration between businesses, organizations, individuals, and local

government. For instance, in New York, the Brooklyn Museum's commitment to welcoming employees and visitors with disabilities was part of the reason why a new, accessible subway station was built near the museum.

Where to Learn More:

- [Job Accommodation Network](#)
- [Accommodations Resources from the U.S. Department of Labor](#)
- [Assistive Technology for the Arts](#)
- [National Arts and Disability Center](#)
- [Tips for Self-Advocacy in the Workplace](#)

Disability Identity and Disclosure Considerations

Identity and Intersectionality

All of us navigate identity in a personal way, often in the context of overlapping identity markers such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, etc. Disability is an added dimension of identity, and the concept of *intersectionality* can be very important to artists with disabilities. Intersectional aspects of identity have resulted in more inclusive and progressive systems of hiring, exhibiting, incubating, and supporting artists and cultural workers from all backgrounds.

The following resources explore issues surrounding identity and disability history:

- [“body/freedom/art”: Rethinking Disability Through Art](#)
- [Disability Cultural Center](#)
- [Disability and Libraries Toolkit: Disability Intersectionality](#)



Chris Downey, Architect. Photo by Don Fogg

“Pursuing a career in the arts requires tremendous talent, skill and passion. It’s not easy for anyone—regardless of their abilities. Breaking through requires not only talent and personal investment but also opportunity. For me, the key to success was to define a truly unique and seemingly counterintuitive value and approach—to find beauty and value in my disability to make it my true and authentic differentiating value. A key strategy is to be real, to seek out those that embrace difference, to share creatively and most importantly to say yes when it’s so easy to say no.”

Chris Downey
Architect

Disclosure

Navigating when and how to disclose a disability, especially one that is not obvious, can be sensitive and difficult. Artists need to consider how their disability identity figures into their artistic practice, and/or how they relay it or disclose it to curators, to casting directors, in residency applications, their biography, etc. Cultural workers may find that it is unclear when or if to disclose their disability identity in job applications, interviews, or even to their co-workers and bosses. Disclosure is often necessary when requesting reasonable accommodations. There's no right answer about disclosure. It's a personal decision.

The following resources can be helpful.

- [Disability Disclosure and Interviewing Techniques for Persons with Disabilities](#) (JAN)
- [The 411 on Disability Disclosure for Youth](#)
- [Youth, Disclosure and the Workplace](#) (ODEP)
- [Job Applicants and the Americans with Disabilities Act](#) (EEOC)



Dancer Toby MacNutt. Photo by Robyn Nicole Film

Rights of Employees and Job Seekers with Disabilities

Certain laws and regulations protect the employment rights of people with disabilities. Key federal regulations to be aware of include the following:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The ADA, specifically its Title I, prohibits discrimination against qualified job applicants or employees with disabilities.

It covers areas such as:

- [Job Applicants and the ADA \(U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission\)](#)
- Hiring and firing
- Promotions
- Wages and compensation
- Job training
- [Questions employers can and cannot](#) ask about your disability or medical condition during an interview and what pre-employment medical tests they can require you to take

One of the key aspects of Title I is the legal requirement to provide reasonable accommodations for [employees](#) and job seekers with disabilities.

[Title I](#) also prohibits employers from [retaliating](#) against someone who objects to employment practices that discriminate based on disability, or for filing a discrimination charge under the ADA. This section of the ADA is enforced by the [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) (EEOC), and it applies to employers with 15 or more employees and state and local governments regardless of how many employees they have.

The Rehabilitation Act

Several sections of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, impact employment, whether in the arts or other fields. These include:

- **Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act**
For individuals interested in working in arts careers with the federal government, it may be helpful to know about [Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act](#). This act prohibits employment discrimination against

qualified individuals with disabilities in the federal sector, including the U.S. Postal Service, the National Park Service, and the Postal Regulatory Commission. It also requires federal agencies to take affirmative action, meaning proactive steps, to recruit and retain individuals with disabilities.

- **Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act**
Some arts organizations may also be covered by [Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act](#), which prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities by federal contractors, meaning companies that do business with the federal government. It also requires some federal contractors to take affirmative steps to recruit and retain disabled workers. Whether or not an arts organization is covered by these additional requirements depends on the type and dollar value of federal contract(s) or subcontract(s) they have and number of people they employ.
- **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act**
[Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act](#) prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities by any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance, such as a grant, which includes many arts institutions. This protection applies to not only qualified individuals with disabilities who apply to and participate in such programs or activities, but also job applicants and employees of the organizations that provide them, regardless of how many people they employ.

Where to Learn More:

- [Employees' Practical Guide to Requesting and Negotiating Reasonable Accommodation Under the ADA \(Job Accommodation Network\)](#)
- [The ADA: Your Employment Rights as an Individual with a Disability \(EEOC\)](#)
- [Disability Employment and the Federal Government \(Office of Personnel Management\)](#)

Navigating Work and Disability Benefits

Some people with disabilities collect disability benefits from the U.S. government, such as Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. While many people believe that joining the workforce or returning to work after a period of absence might disqualify them from continuing to collect these benefits, that may not be the case.

In addition to the information and resources below, the Social Security Administration developed a [Spotlight on Income from the Arts](#), which is a useful resource for disabled artists. And in its [Resources for Job Seekers and Employees](#), the Campaign for Disability Employment explores some of the programs that help people return to work but continue to receive needed benefits until they achieve self-sufficiency.

Programs and Rules That Help People Receiving Disability Benefits Return to Work:

The Social Security Administration (SSA) has several work incentive programs that can help you start or go back to work. These [work incentives](#) include:

- Continued cash benefits for a period of time while you work;
- Continued Medicare or Medicaid for a period of time while you work; and
- Help with education, training, and vocational rehabilitation to start a new line of work.

For more information about SSA's work incentives, read "[Working While Disabled – How We Can Help](#)."

Ticket to Work

SSA's [Ticket to Work](#) (TTW) program helps people who receive SSDI or SSI return to work or begin working if they've never done so. Anyone ages 18 to 64 who receives SSDI or SSI benefits because of his or her disability is eligible to participate. For more information about the TTW program, call 1-866-968-7842 (TTY: 1-866-833-2967), or search for help in your state on the [ChooseWork website](#). Read "[Your Path to Work](#)" and register for a [free webinar](#) to learn more about the TTW program. Work Incentives Seminar Event (WISE) webinars are online events for people who receive Social Security disability benefits and are thinking about going back to work. To better understand how employment may affect SSI and SSDI benefits, please visit [Work Incentives Planning and Assistance](#) (WIPA) to receive accurate information about a successful transition to work.

Trial Work Period

SSA's [trial work period](#) allows you to test your ability to work while still receiving your full Social Security benefits for at least nine months, but the nine months do not have to be consecutive. During the trial work period, you will receive SSI and SSDI in your full benefit amount, no matter how much you earn, if you report your work activity and continue to have a disability. The monthly amount changes every year, but you can check [earnings that start a trial work period](#) by year. **The trial work period does not apply to SSI benefits.** For self-employed people, a trial work month is any month in which a person earns over \$970 or works over 80 hours. The trial work period continues until you have worked nine months within a 60-month (5 years) period. If you're able to work after this time period, your benefits will eventually stop. After the trial work period, you have 36 months (about 3 years) during which you can work and still receive benefits for any month your earnings are not what SSA calls "[substantial gainful activity](#)" (SGA).

SSI Employment Supports

SSA also offers [employment supports](#) specifically for people who receive SSI. Examples of these include the Earned Income Exclusion, the [Plan to Achieve Self-Support](#) (PASS) and [Medicaid While Working](#).

SOURCE: The Campaign for Disability Employment Resources for Job Seekers and Employees.

Worth noting is that SSI (and SSDI) recipients who join (or rejoin) the workforce and have earnings in excess of traditional Medicaid rules may also be eligible for their state's [Medicaid Buy-In program](#). The Administration for Community Living, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), and the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) have developed a helpful [question and answer guide](#) to help you better understand the Medicaid Buy-In Program.

Note: For information on other benefits programs that can help you save for your arts education—including ABLE Accounts, Special Needs Trusts, and PASS—visit the [Ways to Save for Your Arts Education or Professional Training Program](#) section of the toolkit. Also access the NEA's [archived](#) webinar on tools and financial resources for artists with disabilities.

Securing your financial future

The U.S. Department of Labor also provides a [toolkit on securing your financial future for individuals with disabilities](#). The toolkit provides information and resources to help you pursue your financial goals while you:

- Prepare for a Job
- Start a Job
- Maintain a Job
- Change or Lose a Job
- Retire from a Job

Where to Learn More:

- [Navigating Your Arts Career: Resources and Financial Tools for People with Disabilities | National Endowment for the Arts](#)
- [Benefits for People with Disabilities](#)
- [Getting Medicare If You Have a Disability](#)

Arts and Career Resources for Disabled Veterans

Numerous resources are available to help America's military veterans transition to civilian life following their time in service. And for many wounded, ill, and injured veterans, the arts can be a source of great opportunity—both for therapeutic reasons and as a career path.

General Employment Resources for Veterans

The Campaign for Disability Employment recommends the following employment resources for veterans and service members:

- [Veterans Employment Center](#) – This website from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) includes a resume builder, veterans job bank, military skills translator, and other tools.
- [Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment](#) (VR&E) – This VA webpage provides background on VR&E services, which help with job training, employment accommodations, resume development, and job seeking skills coaching.
- [CareerOneStop Veteran and Military Transition Center](#) – A service of the U.S. Department of Labor, this site features resources to help members of the military and veterans with disabilities with their job search.
- [National Resource Directory](#) – This web portal for wounded warriors, transitioning service members, and veterans features a robust [employment section](#).
- [State Veterans Affairs Office](#) – Contact your own state office to learn about job training programs for veterans.
- [Operation PAVE](#) – Paralyzed Veterans of America offers one-on-one vocational assistance and support to all veterans and their families.
- [FedsHireVets](#) – This one-stop resource is designed for veterans interested in federal employment.
- [Veterans' Employment and Career Transition Advisor](#) – This U.S. Department of Labor tool provides important state-specific employment information and resources, including contact information for your local Director for Veterans' Employment and Training.
- [Small Business Association \(SBA\) Veterans' Business Development Resources](#) – These resources from the SBA Office of Veterans Business Development help ensure that the agency's small business programs are available to veterans, service-disabled veterans, Reserve component members, and their dependents or survivors.

Arts-Related Programs for Veterans

In addition, a number of programs and resources provide arts-related job training to veterans, as well as arts experiences. Examples include:

- [Creative Forces](#) – As the National Endowment for the Arts’ Military Healing Arts Network, Creative Forces serves the special needs of military patients and veterans who have been diagnosed with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and psychological health conditions, as well as their families and caregivers. The Creative Forces [resources page](#) features veteran comments, fact sheets, infographics, and more.
- [National Initiative for Arts & Health in the Military](#) – A program sponsored by Americans for the Arts that advances the arts in healthcare, healing, and well-being for military service members, veterans, their families, and caregivers.
- [National Initiative for Arts and Health in the Military’s National Initiative Directory](#) – A directory of individuals and organizations that support or provide programs and services, or information and resources in or about the arts for military service members, veterans, their families, and caregivers.
- [National Veterans Creative Arts Festival](#) – A competition, stage show, and art and writing exhibition that showcases the art, creative writing, dance, drama, and music of veterans treated in the VA national healthcare system.
- [CAMMO \(Center for American Military Music Opportunities\)](#) – This program trains and educates service members, veterans, and their families in music career opportunities.
- [United States Veterans’ Artists Alliance \(USVAA\)](#) – An award-winning, multi-disciplinary non-profit arts organization, founded in 2004 by military veterans and artists.
- [Military Education Benefits](#) – This website from the Los Angeles Film School explains military education benefits and ways to supplement tuition costs.
- [Veterans in Media and Entertainment](#) – This nonprofit networking organization unites current and former members of the military working in the film and television industry.
- [CreatiVets](#) – Provides creative art therapies to veterans facing post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury.
- [Digital Film Academy Veterans Web Page](#) – Outlines eligibility requirements for educational benefits while attending certain programs at Digital Film Academy.

- [Oklahoma Arts and Military Initiative](#) – The Oklahoma Arts Council's Oklahoma Arts and the Military Initiative is a strategic effort directed at meeting the needs of Oklahoma's military community through the arts.
- [Art Spark Texas Distinguished Veteran Artist Program](#) – A program that showcases the artwork of veterans with disabilities.

Where to Learn More:

- [Veterans' Employment and Training Service \(VETS\)](#)
- [Resources for military spouses \(VETS\)](#)

Types of Arts Careers

This final section of the toolkit shows the broad variety of careers available in the arts. Whether you're interested in being a performer, visual artist, teaching artist, administrator, or any other of the broad array of options, a career in the arts offers the opportunity to be a part of a diverse, vibrant community that enriches the lives of people in the United States and across the globe.

To learn more about the wide and varied professions in the arts field, explore the list below. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list, as definitions of what constitutes "working in the arts" vary greatly, and new disciplines and jobs are continually emerging.

For more context, you may also want to access the [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#), which has detailed information (including educational requirements and median pay) about numerous [arts and design occupations](#) and related professions.

- Administration
- Art Therapy, Counseling, and Rehabilitation
- Arts Education
- Dance
- Design
- Disability Inclusion, Accessibility, and Accommodations
- Folk and Traditional Arts
- Literature and Creative Writing
- Media Arts
- Museums, Cultural Sites, and Historic Venues
- Music
- Theater, Television, and Film
- Visitor Experience
- Visual Arts

Administration and Operations

Not all arts careers involve performing or creating. There are countless professionals who support the arts by managing, promoting, curating, selling, directing, and operating arts and cultural institutions. While often “behind-the-scenes,” these occupations are essential to artists and the arts community.

When it comes to administrative positions in the arts, consideration may need to be given to whether an institution is non-profit or for-profit. Both types of institutions have a wide range of administrative functions also found in non-arts-related organizations, such as legal, facilities management, accounting/finance, information technology, and marketing/public relations, to name just a few. As a result, nearly anyone can put their skills to work in support of the arts, even if not an artist themselves. But some people might prefer working for one type of organization over another, and there are some administrative positions specific to each. For example, you typically find fundraisers and grant writers in non-profit institutions. Conversely, auctioneers and art agents usually work at for-profit institutions. Furthermore, regardless of non-profit or for-profit, there are some positions unique to arts institutions (for instance, curator and archivist).

Administrators in the arts are also often called “cultural workers.” Regardless of terminology, it is important to understand that the diversity of jobs in arts administration is as endless as the arts field itself. Below is just a sampling of possible ways you can work in the arts through administration.

- Accountant
- Advocacy
- Archivist
- Art Consultant
- Art Handler
- Artistic Director
- Audience Development Specialist
- Box Office
- Commentator
- Company Manager
- Advertising Director
- Appraiser
- Art Auctioneer
- Art Dealer
- Artist Representative
- Arts and Entertainment Attorney
- Backstage Crew
- Collections Manager
- Communications Manager
- Content Creator

- Copyright Lawyer
- Curator
- Development Officer
- Education Director
- Front of House Staff
- Funder/Grantmaker
- Gallery Manager
- Historian
- Human Resources
- Marketing/Public Relations
- Parking Attendant
- Preparator
- Production Manager
- Public Relations Officer
- Research Evaluator
- Security Guard
- Special Events Coordinator
- Talent Agent
- Tour Manager
- Volunteer and Intern Coordinator
- Critic
- Custodian
- Director of Education
- Exhibitions Coordinator
- Fundraiser
- Gallery Assistant
- Grant Writer
- House Manager
- Lighting Technician
- Museum Exhibit Designer
- Patron Services
- Producer
- Program Development and Presenting
- Publicist
- Running Crew
- Social Media Manager
- Stage Manager
- Ticketing and Guest Services Manager
- Translator

Where to Learn More:

- [National Council of Arts Administrators](#)
- [Association of Arts Administration Educators](#)
- [Americans for the Arts Young Arts Professionals](#)

Arts Education

Use your talents to teach and inspire those around you through a career in arts education in a K-12 setting, community setting, or higher education. A wide variety of jobs in administration also support arts educators and arts-focused educational institutions.

- Art Curriculum Developer
- Artist-in-School
- Higher Education Staff/Faculty
- Public School Art Educator/ Specialist- K-12
- Video Instruction Art Educator
- Art Librarian
- Community-Based Teaching Artist
- Private School Art Educator/ Specialist- K-12
- Researcher and Program Evaluator

Where to Learn More:

- [Arts Education | National Endowment for the Arts](#)
- [National Art Education Association](#)

Creative Arts Therapy

If you use the arts as a way to foster understanding and facilitate a supportive environment, art therapy, counseling, and rehabilitation is an exciting career option. Art therapists may work with rehabilitation specialists and in conjunction with mental health professionals to address a wide variety of physical and mental health conditions. A variety of jobs in administration also support art therapists and the organizations for which they work.

- Art Therapist
- Drama Therapist
- Play Therapist
- Dance/Movement Therapist
- Music Therapist

Where to Learn More:

- [American Art Therapy Association](#)
- [North American Drama Therapy Association](#)
- [American Dance Therapy Association](#)
- [American Music Therapy Association](#)
- [National Coalition of Creative Arts Therapies Associations](#)

Dance

Express yourself through movement with a career in dance. Here are some of the ways you can pursue a career as a professional dancer or work behind the scenes in dance production. A wide variety of jobs in administration also support dancers and dance-focused organizations.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| • Agent/Artist Representative | • Artistic Director |
| • Choreographer | • Community/Engagement Programmer |
| • Company Manager | • Costume Designer |
| • Dance Notator | • Dance Therapist |
| • Dance Writer/Critic | • Dancer |
| • Donor/Corporate Donation Relations | • Dramaturg/Literary Manager |
| • Lighting Designer | • Lighting Technician |
| • Makeup Artist | • Massage Therapist |
| • Physical Therapist | • Producer/Curator |
| • Production Manager | • Répétiteur |
| • Scenic Designer | • Sound Designer |
| • Sound Technician | • Stagehand |
| • Technical Director | |

“Seek out training as early as possible. There are a number of integrated dance companies throughout the US that provide training. Understand that there is a wide and diverse opportunity to learn from each of the companies. Not all integrated dance is the same. Know that there are career opportunities in many of the companies too...as dancers, choreographers, and teachers.... the sky's the limit if you work hard and are dedicated to achieving your dreams!”

Mary Verdi-Fletcher
Dancer, President/Founding Artistic Director,
Dancing Wheels Company & School

Where to Learn More:

- [Dance USA](#)
- [Dance/USA Deaf and Disability Affinity Group](#)
- [Disability. Dance. Artistry Dancemaker Directory](#)
- [Choreo-Lab | AXIS Dance Company](#)
- [Dance For All Bodies | Inclusive Dance Classes | Adaptive Dance](#)
- [Dancing Disability Lab - UCLA Disability Studies Inclusion Labs](#)
- [Gallaudet Dance Company | Gallaudet University](#)
- [Forward Motion Festival | Miami, FL | Karen Peterson Dancers](#)

Design

A career in design leverages vision, artistic talent, computer skills, fashion sense, and more. Check out the following professions in the visual and graphic design field. A variety of jobs in administration also support designers and design-focused organizations.

- Architect
- Book Illustrator
- Comic Book Artist
- Display Designer
- Fashion Consultant
- Furniture Designer
- Graphic Designer
- Interior Decorator
- Jewelry Designer
- Landscape Designer
- Product Designer
- Shoe Designer
- Software Designer
- Toy Designer
- Universal Designer
- Urban Planner
- Video Game Designer
- Automotive Designer
- Cartoon Artist
- Costume Designer
- Environmental Designer
- Fashion Designer
- Golf Course Designer
- Industrial Designer
- Interior Designer
- Landscape Architect
- Naval Architect
- Set Designer
- Social Impact Designer
- Textile Designer
- Transport Designer
- Urban Designer
- User Interface/User Experience (UI/UX) Designer
- Web Designer

Where to Learn More:

- [Disability Design: Summary Report from a Field Scan](#)
- [American Institute of Graphic Arts](#)
- [UX, Visual, or Graphic: Which Type of Design is Right for You?](#)
- [What is Visual Design?](#)
- [American Institute of Architects](#)
- [Careers in Architecture](#)
- [Open Style Lab](#)
- [NEA Podcast: Conversations about Disability Design](#)

Disability Inclusion, Accessibility, and Accommodation Services

As part of equity efforts, many arts organizations are taking steps to ensure all people have equal opportunity to work in the arts and to access art. These efforts are often managed by professional disability inclusion, accessibility, and accommodation professionals. The title and specifics of the job may vary, but the goal remains the same: to ensure all people, including those with disabilities, can participate, whether as customers or employees. A variety of jobs in administration also support efforts to increase inclusion, accessibility, and accommodations in the arts.

- Accessibility Coordinator
- American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreter
- Certified Deaf Interpreter
- Deaf Consultants
- Tactile Sign Language Interpreter
- Video Captioners
- Accommodation Coordinator
- Audio Describers
- Communication Access Real-Time Translation (CART) Captioner
- Sign/ASL Masters/Director of Artistic Sign Language (DASL)
- Theatrical Sign Language Interpreter

Where to Learn More:

- [ADA Coordinator Training Certification Program - Great Plains ADA Center](#)
- [Center of Excellence in Nonvisual Access](#)
- [The National Federation of the Blind, Braille Certification](#)
- [American Council of the Blind Audio Description Project](#)
- [The National Association of the Deaf \(NAD\)](#)

Folk and Traditional Arts

Art is often deeply rooted in communities, traditions, language, and heritage. Learn how you can combine your skills and cultural knowledge to create a career in traditional art. A variety of jobs in administration also support the folk and traditional arts.

- Blacksmith
- Ethnomusicologist
- Ironworker
- Needle Worker
- Quilter
- Weaver
- Woodworker
- Dancer
- Folklorist
- Musician
- Potter
- Stone Carver
- Woodcarver

Where to Learn More:

- [National Endowment for the Arts: National Heritage Fellowships](#)
- [National Council for Folk and Traditional Arts](#)
- [American Craft Council](#)
- Connect with your [State Arts Agency's](#) folk arts coordinator

Literature and Creative Writing

If you're skilled in poetry, prose, or publishing, the field of literature and creative writing may be a professional fit. Learn about careers in literature, publishing, and more using the resources below. A variety of jobs in administration also support writers and literary institutions.

- Blogger
- Book Publisher
- Bookseller
- Critic
- Book Designer
- Booking Manager
- Copywriter
- Curator

- Distributor
- Ghostwriter
- Librarian
- Literary Translator
- Magazine Proofreader
- Poet
- Proposal Writer
- Publisher
- Speechwriter
- Editor
- Journalist
- Literary Agent
- Magazine Designer
- Novelist
- Proofreader
- Prose Writer
- Screenwriter
- Technical Writer

Where to Learn More:

- [National Endowment for the Arts: Literary Arts](#)
- [Association of Writers and Writing Programs](#)
- [The Disability Visibility Project](#)
- [Disabled Writers](#)
- [FundsforWriters](#)
- [Zoeglossia](#)
- [NEA Blog: Interview with NEA Literature Fellow Meg Day](#)
- [NEA Blog: Grant Spotlight on Zoeglossia](#)
- [NEA Podcast: Rebekah Taussig, Author, Teacher and Advocate](#)
- [NEA Big Read Author and Creative Writing Fellow: Ilya Kaminsky and His Book *Deaf Republic*](#)

Media Arts

The National Endowment for the Arts defines “media arts” as all genres and forms that use electronic media, film, and technology as an artistic medium or a medium to broaden arts appreciation and awareness of any discipline. Start exploring the varied art forms in this field. A variety of jobs in administration also support those in the media arts and media institutions.

- 3D Animator
- Audio-Visual Engineer
- Camera Operator (TV/Video/
Film)
- Cinematographer
- Curator
- Digital Effects Designer
- Editor
- Festival Programmer
- Film Director
- Film/TV Critic
- Game Designer/Writer
- Graphics Designer/Artist/
Animator
- Interactive Media Specialist
- Multimedia Developer
- Podcast Producer
- Production Assistant
- Production Technician
- Radio/Television/Film Producer
- Showrunner
- Social Media Manager
- Sound Artist
- Studio Technician
- Television/Film Director
- Videographer
- Visual Effects Animator
- Web Designer
- Actor
- Broadcast Marketer
- Casting Director
- Computer Animator
- Developer
- Distributor
- Editorial Assistant
- Field Producer
- Film Editor
- Foley Artist
- Game Level Designer
- Interactive Content Specialist
- Motion Graphics Designer
- Multimedia Producer
- Production Artist
- Production Manager
- Programmer (Computer
Software/Virtual Reality/
Creative Coding)
- Screenwriter
- Social Media Content Creator
- Software Developer
- Sound Designer
- Television Reporter
- Video Producer
- Virtual Reality Designer
- Voice Over Artist

Where to Learn More:

- [NEA Media Arts Resources List](#)
- [National Endowment for the Arts: Media Arts](#)
- [RespectAbility Labs for Entertainment Professionals with Disabilities](#)
- [CripTech Incubator](#)

Museums, Cultural Sites, and Historic Venues

Cultural careers expand far beyond the actual creation of art. See what careers you can pursue in museums and cultural sites. A variety of jobs in administration also support museums, cultural sites, and historic venues.

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| • Archivist | • Art Handler/Mover |
| • Art Historian | • Art Restorer |
| • Collections Database/
Systems Analysis | • Conservator |
| • Curator | • Docent |
| • Exhibitions | • Framer |
| • Guide | • Library |
| • Membership | • Museum Director |
| • Museum Shop/Retail | • Museum Technician |
| • Photo Reproduction/Copyright | • Photographer |
| • Protective Services | • Registrar/Collections
Management |
| • Visitor Services | • Volunteer Services |

Where to Learn More:

- [American Alliance of Museums](#)
- [American Alliance of Museums Museum Careers Guide](#)
- [The Association of Art Museum Curators](#)

Music

Love to sing or edit music? Do you aspire to play a musical instrument professionally? A career in music maybe for you. Learn about various occupations that fall under the musical arts umbrella and check out additional resources to help inform your career. A variety of jobs in administration also support musicians and music-focused institutions.

- Arranger
- Choral Director
- Conductor
- Disc Jockey
- Ethnomusicologist
- Lyricist
- Musical Instrument Maker
- Opera Singer
- Orchestrator
- Songwriter
- Audio Engineer
- Composer
- Cultural Anthropologist
- Educator
- Film Score Composer
- Music Therapist
- Musician
- Orchestra Librarian
- Singer
- Sound Effects Editor

Where to Learn More:

- [American Guild of Musical Artists](#)
- [Coalition for Disabled Musicians](#)
- [National Resource Center for Blind Musicians](#)
- [Recording Artists and Music Professionals with Disabilities \(RAMPD\)](#)
- [NEA Blog: A Conversation with Musician Gaelynn Lea](#)
- [NEA Blog: An Art Talk with Jazz Musician Matthew Whitaker](#)

Theater, Television, and Film

From Broadway to regional venues, the theater offers a wide range of careers, both on and off the stage. Likewise, television and film offer exciting opportunities for those with talent in front of or behind the camera. Learn how to get your career in theater, television, and film started with this sampling of occupations. A variety of jobs in administration also support the exciting world of theater, television, and film.

- Actor
- Artistic Director
- Book Writer
- Broadcaster
- Casting Director
- Cinematographer
- Content Producer
- Costume Cutter
- Costume Stitcher
- Dialect or Voice Coach
- Director
- Editor
- Foley Artist
- Lighting Technician
- Makeup Artist
- Playwright
- Production Artist
- Production Technician
- Prop Designer
- Reporter
- Screenwriter
- Sound Artist
- Stage Manager
- Animator
- Audio-Visual Engineer
- Broadcast Marketer
- Camera Operator (TV/Video/Film)
- Choreographer
- Composer
- Costume Crafts Person
- Costume Designer
- Critic
- Digital Effects Designer
- Dramaturg/Literary Manager
- Field Producer
- Lighting Designer
- Lyricist
- Music Director
- Producer
- Production Manager
- Projection Designer
- Puppeteer
- Scenic Designer
- Showrunner
- Sound Designer
- Stagehand

- Studio Technician
- Usher
- Videographer
- Wardrobe Manager
- Stunt Artist
- Ventriloquist
- Vocal Coach
- Wig Maker

Where to Learn More:

- [Actors Equity Association](#)
- [Video: Performers with Disabilities: Know Your Rights on Set \(SAG-AFTRA\)](#)
- [Equity & Inclusion \(SAG-AFTRA\)](#)
- [ReelAbilities Film Festival](#)
- [Superfest Disability Film Festival](#)
- [Easter Seals Disability Film Challenge](#)
- [SignLight International Film Festival | Hollywood Meets Deaf & Sign Language \(signlightff.org\)](#)
- [Documentary Filmmakers With Disabilities \(FWD-Doc\)](#)
- [AXS Film Fund – Breaking Barriers for Unheard Voices](#)
- [NEA Podcast Interview: Meet Mickey Rowe](#)
- [NEA Blog: Theatre Breaking Through Barriers](#)
- [NEA Blog: Phamaly Theatre](#)
- [NEA Blog: DJ Kurs - Deaf West Theatre's Signs of Community](#)

Visitor Experience

Those involved in visitor experience are the face of an arts organization, managing all the touchpoints between visitors and the programs and services it offers. From shop workers to security guards, these individuals interact with and guide visitors, helping play a large role in their arts and cultural experience, and their relationship to the organization as a whole. There are a wide variety of jobs that fall under visitor experience, with some overlap with administration.

- Audience Development Specialist
- Certified Interpretive Guide
- Front of House Manager
- Gallery Manager
- Guest Services Manager
- Interpretation Manager
- Interpretative Planner
- Sales Associate
- Store Buyer
- Store Manager
- Ticketing
- Translator Gallery Assistant
- Visitor Experience Specialist
- Box Office
- Exhibit Interpreter
- Gallery Attendant
- Group Tour Manager
- Guest Services Representative
- Interpretative Assistant
- Membership Manager
- Security Officer
- Store Curator and Designer
- Technician
- Tour Manager
- Visitor Experience Associate

Visual Arts

The visual arts are a field that spans the traditional fine arts, as well as applied arts and craft making. It is often interwoven with historic sites or cultural sites where visual arts may be on display. Explore the list of careers in this category, as well as the resource links where you can learn more about this vast field. A variety of jobs in administration also support visual artists, visual arts institutions, and historic venues.

- Advertising Photographer
- Animators for Film/Television
- Art Dealer
- Billboard Artist
- Calligrapher
- Cartographer
- Ceramicist/Pottery Maker
- Craft Artist
- Digital Artist
- Engraver
- Air Brusher
- Art Conservator
- Art Director
- Blacksmith
- Caricature Artist
- Cartoonist
- Courtroom Sketch Artist
- Curator
- Educator
- Exhibit Designer

- Floral Designer
- Gallerist
- Graffiti Artist
- Illustrator
- Lithographer
- Mosaic Artist
- Muralist
- Performance Artist
- Photographer (Wildlife, Aerial, Wedding, Documentary, Commercial, Celebrity)
- Portrait Artist
- Print Layout and Publication Designer
- Screen Printer
- Social Practice Artist
- Stained Glass Artist
- Textile Designer/Artist
- Furniture Maker
- Glassblower
- Ice Sculptor
- Jewelry Designer
- Metal Fabricator
- Multimedia Artist
- Painter
- Performer
- Photojournalist
- Potter
- Printmaker
- Sculptor
- Special Effects Designers
- Tattoo Artist
- Woodturner

Where to Learn More:

- [Creative Capital](#)
- [National Arts and Disability Center \(NADC\)](#)
- [VSA Emerging Young Artists](#)
- [Mouth and Foot Painting Artists](#)
- [Disabled Art](#)
- Funding opportunities with your [State Arts Agency](#)
- [NEA Blog: Interview with Artist Christine Sun Kim](#)
- [NEA Blog: Interview with Gordon Sasaki](#)