

# Best Practices for Welcoming Visitors With Blindness / Low Vision

Created to accompany the Big Astronomy Outreach Toolkit for Blind and Low Vision Audiences [bigastronomy.org/education](https://bigastronomy.org/education)

Many of us would like to welcome more visitors with blindness or low vision (B/LV) to our museums and events. Here you will find a list of best practices compiled from several sources (included with the additional resources) to help museums become more inclusive in our public engagement.

## In Advance

1. Have information on your “plan your visit” webpage regarding available accommodations, especially if any part needs to be reserved in advance. If your site offers field trips, ask for any accommodations needed on the request form.
2. Have a written description of your layout rather than (or in addition to) a picture. Example: “The planetarium is on the right, down a wide hallway about 30 ft from the front entrance.”
3. It’s easy to make your website friendly for text readers. A text reader is a software program or app that reads text aloud. Some sites that can help you find out if your site is accessible:
  - <https://www.w3.org>
  - <https://webaim.org/techniques/screenreader>
4. Low vision visitors may have needs such as getting closer to the exhibit, size of print needed, orientation and mobility needs (how the visitor gets around), and implications of other disabilities. Be sure to list what is available.
5. Organize the workspace with B/LV visitors in mind. For example, keep items from rolling away from the work area by using a tray with sides. Orient the visitor to the tray by describing the items on the tray (or table) from left to right or referring to a clock face. Example: “The beads are at the top right side,” or, “the clay is at 6 o’clock.”

6. Use tactile or “real” objects with low vision or totally blind visitors. Unless the low vision visitor is a “visual learner” as indicated in their information, paper-and-pencil or crayons or paints may not be useful.
7. Review [Universal Design Principles](#). These seven guidelines are about accessibility for everyone, not only B/LV populations.
8. Proper lighting is a must for all visual tasks. Ask what type of lighting is preferred by those with limited vision - each person may have different needs.
9. Using high contrast colors can help you distinguish one object from another. (Example: Dark tablecloth with white plates.) It’s even better if you use different textures as well.
10. Provide a schedule for the visitor, either in large print, braille or with symbols to help them anticipate the day’s activities.

## During the Visit

1. Introduce yourself every time you arrive. “Hello, I’m Joanna with Guest Services.”
2. Describe in simple terms where you will go with the visitor. “We’ll be going to the planetarium. We’ll walk down this hall on the right. Then, at the end, we’ll turn right. It’s the door on the left.”
3. If the visitor needs assistance getting around, offer them your arm and have them hold on just above your elbow. **Always ask if any assistance is desired first.**
4. Be sure to let the visitor know when you are leaving the area. Example: “I’ll be right back. I’m just going down to the office to get more materials.” or “I’m leaving now. Nice meeting you.” And when you are back, let them know you are back.

# General Do's & Don'ts

## When speaking with a person who has Blindness or Low Vision:

- DO identify yourself, especially when entering a room. Don't say, "Do you know who this is?"
- DO speak directly to the individual. Do not speak through a companion. Unless they are hard of hearing, they can speak for themselves.
- DO give specific directions like, "The desk is five feet to your right," as opposed to saying, "The desk is over there."
- DO give a clear word picture when describing things to an individual with vision loss. Include details such as color, texture, shape, and landmarks. (You used a comma elsewhere with lists of nouns, so I inserted a comma here.)
- DO touch them on the arm or use their name when addressing them. This lets them know you are speaking to them, and not someone else in the room.
- DON'T shout when you speak. They can't see but often have fine hearing.
- DON'T be afraid to use words like "blind" or "see." Their eyes may not work, but it is still, "Nice to see you."

## If you see a Blind person who seems to be in need of assistance:

- DO introduce yourself and ask the person if they need assistance.
- DO provide assistance if it is requested.
- DO respect the wishes of the person who is blind.
- DON'T insist upon trying to help if your offer of assistance is declined.

## If a Blind person asks you for directions:

- DO use words such as "straight ahead," "turn left," "on your right."
- DON'T point and say, "Go that way," or, "It's over there."

## If you are asked to guide a Blind person:

- DO allow the person you are guiding to hold your arm and follow as you walk.
- DO move your guiding arm behind your back when approaching a narrow space so the person you are guiding can step behind you and follow single-file. This may be counter-intuitive, as we often want a guest to go first. In this case, leading the way is more helpful.
- DO allow the person you are guiding to find the handrail and locate the edge of the first step before proceeding.
- DON'T grab the person you are guiding by the hand, arm, or shoulder and try to steer him.
- DON'T EVER grab the person's cane or the handle of a guide's harness.
- DO refer to [Sighted Guide Techniques](#) for more information.

## Steps / Signage:

- DO hesitate briefly at a curb or at the beginning of a flight of stairs.
- DO tell the person you are guiding whether the steps go up or down. And provide an approximation of the number of steps.
- If possible, adding colored grippy tape to each step is a benefit to those with low vision.
- DO follow the ADA code. Signs should be 5 feet up and on the opposite side of the hinges. This will prevent people from getting hit with the door.

## General guidelines:

- DON'T pet, feed, or distract a guide dog. They are not pets; they are working companions on whom a Blind person depends.
- DO treat Blind people as individuals. People with visual disabilities come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. They each have their own strengths and weaknesses, just like everyone else.