

**Building a Movement:**

**How Pittsburgh's Arts and Cultural Community is  
Embracing Accessibility and Inclusion of People with  
Disabilities**

A Work in Progress

Large Print format

2013



## Credits:

Interviews conducted by Barbara Paull.

FISA Foundation would like to thank all of the arts and cultural organizations that have participated in some way in advancing accessibility and inclusion. We regret that it is not possible to give individual credit to all participating organizations in this report.

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Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Something special is happening in Pittsburgh.

Our rich and vibrant arts and cultural organizations are, as a community, taking giant leaps forward in improving access and full inclusion for people with disabilities -- not only as patrons, but also as volunteers, staff, donors and artists. Not because of a lawsuit or fear of one (unfortunately, the most common reason we witness this kind of sea change) but with a deep, shared commitment that this is the right thing to do. Over the past four years, we've seen many arts organization leaders emerge as passionate advocates for inclusion of people with disabilities. More than one has said to me, "Kristy, of all the things I've accomplished in my career, this is the BEST thing I've ever done." This personal commitment is gratifying, but as a funder, FISA is particularly pleased to see that access and inclusion has also become part of the culture in many institutions.

This work is not nearly finished. For every step forward and success worthy of celebration, there are at least as many real

physical, programmatic and attitudinal barriers that remain. Inclusion is a process, and I'm not sure that we will ever be able to call it "Done." But something important is working in our community, and we at FISA have learned a great deal from this process. We hope that a glimpse into this work-in-progress will inspire and teach you as well.

FISA Foundation's mission is to build a culture of respect and improve the quality of life for women, girls, and people with disabilities in southwestern Pennsylvania. We have modest resources, and as with everything we do, this focus on arts accessibility is essentially about partnerships – with grantees, nonprofits, other funders and community leaders. Many, but not all, are specifically highlighted in this report.

This publication highlights the unfolding of events and relationships and what we learned along the way. We invite you to learn along with us and would welcome your feedback and ideas about next steps.

Kristy Trautmann

Executive Director

FISA Foundation

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## **BACKGROUND NOTES:**

### **Common Accessibility Accommodations for the Arts**

**Accessible Seating:** This includes designated spaces for wheelchair users (and companion seats) as well as aisle seats with arms that swing away, allowing people to easily transfer into a seat from a wheelchair, walker or other assistive device.

**American Sign Language Interpretation:** Trained professionals interpret spoken words into American Sign Language (ASL) for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. ASL is its own language, not a word-for-word symbolic interpretation of English.

**Assistive Listening:** Headsets amplify sound for people who are hard of hearing.

**Audio description:** A trained describer narrates the movements, facial expressions, staging, sets, and lighting during the performance to provide people who are blind or have low vision with the context they would otherwise miss. The program is also read aloud before the performance.

**Braille, Large Print and Electronic Programs:** These formats are available for people who are blind or who have low vision.

**Captioning:** A trained provider types a transcript of spoken words, projected live onto a screen (open captioning) or a handheld device (closed captioning). This service is particularly useful for those with hearing loss who don't use sign language.

**Sensory Programs or Touch Tours:** Often held in conjunction with audio described performances, these programs allow people who are blind to connect voices with characters, and interact with scenery and costumes to provide additional context in advance of the performance.

**Curb to Seat Service:** This service, important to people with visual impairments or limited mobility, provides assistants to help patrons in getting from the front door of the building to their seat in the theater.

The **Americans with Disabilities Act** was signed into law in 1991, establishing the rights of people with disabilities to access public accommodations. While this pivotal law was successful in improving access in innumerable ways, it was designed to be complaint-driven rather than something that is proactively monitored. In the intervening decades, lawsuits and settlements have successfully forced changes that were overdue. But in spite of these many successes, misperceptions about the ADA continue to be widespread. Many building owners continue to falsely believe that they are exempt, or have somehow been “grandfathered in,” when no such provision exists in the law.

Ongoing advocacy is necessary to ensure compliance with this decades-old law.

**Pittsburgh Cultural Trust:** The Trust was conceived in 1984 as an organization to redevelop a languishing part of downtown Pittsburgh as an arts neighborhood and destination. The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust owns and operates numerous properties, including the Benedum Center for the Performing Arts, the Byham Theater, the O'Reilly Theater, Theater Square and the Harris Theater. In addition to the Trust's own

programming, such as the PNC Broadway Across America Series, Pittsburgh Dance Council, First Night Pittsburgh, and the Pittsburgh International Children's Theater, many other organizations rent the Trust's facilities. These include the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, Pittsburgh CLO, Pittsburgh Opera, and Pittsburgh Public Theater. The Trust also provides a mechanism for these organizations and the August Wilson Center and Pittsburgh Symphony, to share back office services, including ticketing.

### **Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability (LEAD)**

**Conference:** LEAD is a professional network focused on expanding the breadth and scope of accessibility services and programming across the country and around the world. Its annual conference features dozens of educational seminars on physical and programmatic access, universal and socially sustainable design, employment, legal issues, marketing strategies, planning, leadership and advocacy.

Since 2010, FISA has supported local arts administrators to attend the LEAD conference. It is a low-cost investment that greatly enhances local knowledge, builds connections with

national leaders, and produces many champions who are passionately committed to accessibility and inclusion.

**Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council (GPAC):** GPAC is the business-to-business organization serving the local arts industry. With a membership of over 270 organizations and artists representing roughly 2,500 individuals, GPAC serves as the voice for the arts and culture in the greater Pittsburgh region. It regularly provides professional education, is a trusted conduit for information and advice, organizes advocacy efforts and re-grants funds from local and national sources.

**FISA-sponsored workshops offered in 2009:**

**Build and Sustain Your Audience: The Benefits of Inclusion and Universal Design.** Presented by the Smithsonian Institution Accessibility Program and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Office for Accessibility.

**Accessibility on a Budget: How to Provide Affordable, Accessible Cultural Events.** Presented by Amaryllis Theatre Company/VSA Arts of Pennsylvania.

## **2011 Arts Accessibility Workshop Series:**

With FISA support, GPAC organized a series of six “Lunch and Learn” workshops for arts managers. Each session featured an expert from the disability community (often a person with a disability) as well as local arts professionals, highlighting their current successes in promoting accessibility and inclusion.

**Accessible Facilities & ADA Changes**, May 2011.

**Accessible Exhibits and Tours**, June 2011.

**Accessible Programming**, July 2011.

**Accessible Marketing: How to Create Accessible Marketing Materials**, August 2011.

**Accessible Marketing II: Reaching and Engaging People with Disabilities**, September 2011.

**Presenting Artists with Disabilities**, October 2011.

**GPAC 2012-13 Accessibility Trainings:**

**Intensive Audio Description Training for Theatre, May 2012.**

**Why It Matters: Accessibility as an Asset, February 2013.**

**How It Feels: First Encounters, March 2013.**

**What You Can Do: Creating an Accessibility Plan, April, 2013.**

## **MAIN NARRATIVE:**

### **Building a Movement: How Pittsburgh's Arts and Cultural Community is Embracing Accessibility and Inclusion of People with Disabilities**

Over the last four years, FISA Foundation has strategically invested in promoting inclusion of people with disabilities into the region's arts and cultural life, not in one or two grantee organizations, but across the whole landscape of performing arts, theatre, visual arts and museums. In 2009 it was rare to find an arts organization in this region with an overt focus on including people with disabilities in a meaningful way. But by 2013 it has become common to find “accessibility” tabs on websites of cultural organizations providing information for visitors with disabilities. An explosion of accommodations has become available in a relatively short time. Kristy Trautmann, Executive Director of FISA Foundation explains, “We knew the activities FISA had funded and supported during these years, but we wanted to pause and take stock through this report: How did people who, a few years ago, rarely gave a thought to people with disabilities become so excited and proud of their work and

eager to accelerate accessibility and inclusion? What were the catalysts that promoted this change?”

The core of this report will document the focused rapid growth in arts accessibility and inclusion between the years 2009 and 2013. It's important to note that a few pioneering efforts to improve arts accessibility existed prior to 2009, and that FISA's expectation is that even greater accomplishments will occur in the future.

### **Contextual Prequel: Arts Accessibility in Pittsburgh before 2009**

Between FISA's founding in 1996 and the year 2005, the Foundation awarded about \$100,000 in small grants to support arts enrichment for people with disabilities. FISA's founding Executive Director, Dee Delaney, wanted “to support areas where little had been done and groups that other funders in the community weren't focused on” and this was one of many strategies to advance the Foundation's mission of improving the

quality of life for people with disabilities. Over the next five years, two organizations -- City Theatre and the Pittsburgh Opera -- emerged as early leaders in focusing attention on access for people with disabilities. City Theatre's efforts were led by then-Education Director, Diane Nutting. At the time, City Theatre estimated that between five and ten percent of its patrons had hearing, visual or mobility loss, and believed that the company could better serve these patrons and build upon this market which was often overlooked by other arts and cultural organizations. As an early step, City Theatre began working with Mimi Kenney-Smith of VSA Pennsylvania (formerly Very Special Arts, an advocacy organization dedicated to promoting access and inclusion for people with disabilities in the arts) on structuring an audio description program to increase access for patrons with visual impairments. FISA awarded \$10,000 to purchase the necessary equipment, with the understanding that it would be available on loan to any local arts organization, and to underwrite a three-day training for City Theatre staff and individuals from several other cultural organizations to become skilled audio describers. Audio-description has been offered every season since 2005-6, and accommodations have evolved

to include braille and large print programs and pre-show sensory workshops.

The following year City Theatre took its next step – to move inclusion of people with disabilities as patrons onto the stage itself through the production of *Pyretown*. The play features a young man who uses a wheelchair as a main character. FISA turned down the original proposal for funding the production because there were no plans to hire an actor with a disability to portray the male lead. Both partners regrouped after the initial declination, not wanting to end the conversation. City Theatre couldn't identify a qualified local actor with a disability, so FISA provided funding for a casting trip to California. The grant of just over \$20,000 was a learning opportunity. When City Theatre hired Tobias (Toby) Forrest to play the lead, the staff quickly became aware of numerous accessibility barriers from housing to transportation to the theater itself. FISA helped convene an advisory committee of people with disabilities who assisted City Theatre in beginning to remove barriers. The performance was well received in the community, and City Theatre learned a great deal about accessibility that it continues to implement today. In

fact, the 2013-14 season includes the play *Tribes*, which features a deaf lead character. City Theatre is conducting a national search to audition deaf actors for the role.

The Pittsburgh Opera was another early leader in arts accessibility, primarily spearheaded by the work of Marilyn Egan who joined the Pittsburgh Opera staff as director of education in 2002. Egan was already deeply committed to the blind community having volunteered for 26 years as a “reader” for Radio Information Service, a program for people who are visually impaired. Her producer on that radio program was Joyce Driben, a woman who has been blind from birth. Egan says the experience taught her that everyone deserves the opportunity to learn, to attend arts events, and to be included. “Too often we make assumptions about people who are different from the way we are, whether they have a disability, a different background, or a different look. Hopefully, I've learned to be inclusive automatically.”

Shortly after she joined the Pittsburgh Opera staff, Egan began offering amenities, such as large print programs to opera goers who need an easy-to-read guide to the evening's performance.

At Joyce Driben's urging, Egan was trained at City Theatre to use audio description equipment, and launched an innovative service that has been in operation at the Opera for years: Ten minutes before each act, a volunteer reads the Opera's program notes to people who are visually impaired. Pittsburgh Opera provides an audio commentary service for patrons with vision loss at the Tuesday performances. Through an Infrared Hearing Device, patrons can hear the supertitles as they appear on screen above the stage, plus descriptions of the set, characters and costumes. The Opera also offers a sensory workshop before the performance so patrons can learn about what to expect on stage. Since 2002, the Opera has audio described 51 operas and has sold more than 10 consistent annual subscriptions to people with visual impairments.

**“Lesson 1: Be humble.** “The beginning” point for you is rarely the beginning point for others. Assume there are people already engaged in your issue and take time to learn from them and build on their successes.””

## **2009: Economic Adversity as a Gateway for Change**

During the economic challenges of 2008-2009, FISA Foundation took a significant financial hit, as did most endowments. The Foundation's practice of awarding multi-year grants meant that in 2009 there were fewer funds available for grantmaking and a sizable portion of the grants budget had been previously committed. Dee Delaney found that during that period she had time but not money to invest in social change. Local arts organizations were also suffering. Attendance was down, with many patrons hesitant to buy subscriptions. Local funders were supporting audience development strategies to help cultural organizations be more systematic and strategic in reaching new groups of patrons.

FISA saw an opportunity and began approaching arts organizations, positioning outreach to people with disabilities as an underutilized audience development focus.

Over the course of the year, Delaney pursued three goals:

1. **Educate arts organizations about the number of people with disabilities in the community and their collective spending power.**

*According to the U.S. Department of Labor, approximately 18 percent of the United States population has a disability, and collectively people with disabilities are estimated to control \$175 billion in discretionary spending. In addition, according to the US Census Bureau, 37 percent of the over-65 population in the Pittsburgh region has a disability. Thus accessibility helps organizations retain patrons as they age, in addition to attracting new audiences.*

FISA didn't have many established relationships with arts and cultural organizations and didn't have funds to offer an RFP to increase accessibility, so the foundation had to be creative.

Delaney began to attend open workshops for arts managers about audience development and would seize opportunities to educate them about outreach to people with disabilities.

2. **Dialogue with other foundations that fund the arts about the importance of increasing accessibility.**

Delaney also worked through Grantmakers of Western Pennsylvania to offer an educational program for arts funders about accessibility and inclusion. Typically, educational sessions on disability-related issues are not well attended, but she used her convening power. "I called everyone I knew," she said, "and had about 30 people from 15 different foundations attending. I spoke to them about the importance of accessibility and encouraged them to speak about accessibility with their grantees." In the spirit of *Nothing About Us Without Us* (a strong value of the disability community), FISA invited a local accessibility expert Lucy Spruill, who has a disability herself, to address the group. Spruill was very effective in providing a personal perspective on barriers she had experienced attending cultural venues and offered concrete suggestions for improvement. A lot of seeds were planted that day at virtually no cost.

- 3. Support professional development opportunities for arts managers to demonstrate tangible accessibility improvements that can be implemented at low cost.**

During 2009, it became an asset to have a bit more time, even though funds were scarce. It allowed FISA Foundation's very small staff to invest time in identifying speakers, planning logistics, and working its phone and email lists to generate good attendance at these early workshops. Bringing in national experts made the sessions attractive, and the agendas were structured to provide practical information. Delaney drew heavily on her network, including a connection with Betty Siegel at Washington, D.C.'s John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. "I took a tour of the Kennedy Center some years ago," she recalled, "and I was blown away by how much they did for people with disabilities. They were way ahead of the game." She drew on Siegel to suggest other keynote speakers. Additionally, local experts from Pittsburgh's disability community were invited to participate as speakers and attendees, which built bridges from the very beginning between the arts and disabilities communities.

**“LESSON 2: Be opportunistic.** Be willing to invest time building relationships and learning the landscape. In the first

year of the arts initiative, FISA invested less than \$10,000, but built a strong foundation for future grants.””

“”**Lesson 3: “Nothing About Us Without Us.”** It’s essential to gain the perspective of those you are trying to serve. Include people with disabilities in the process. While arts managers were receptive to learning more about accessibility, the issue took on more urgency when it became personal. It was no longer abstract ‘people’ who couldn’t attend performances, it was Lucy and Judy and John and Joyce. This provided more leverage than FISA ever could have as a small foundation.””

### **Year Two: 2010 – A Shift to Long Term Strategy**

By early 2010, Pittsburgh’s nonprofit community was beginning to adjust to the new economic realities of doing more with less. As FISA’s business began to return to a more normal pace, it became increasingly difficult for the Foundation to continue the role as convener or to provide the level of backbone support that was necessary. But most importantly, Dee Delaney announced

her plans to retire. It became urgent to develop a more sustainable structure to support arts and cultural organizations in becoming more accessible and inclusive.

FISA reached out to two important nonprofit partners to initiate change: The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust and the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council.

FISA had a relationship with the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, having previously funded an assistive listening system for the Benedum Center, and Trust staff participated in the early accessibility workshops. Delaney requested a meeting to talk about how the Trust might take a more central role in promoting access and inclusion. She shared with them a brochure produced by the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. which highlighted in one publication all of the various accessibility accommodations available and how to request them. Delaney asked, “What would it take for the District to have a centralized source of accessibility information just like this?” After considerable dialogue, FISA provided a \$40,000 grant to support accessibility audits of all of the Trust’s facilities, as well as Heinz Hall and the August Wilson Center, with the goal of

developing an accessibility plan and better publicizing the features that patrons with disabilities could request. FISA also provided a small stipend to support travel and tuition to the Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability (LEAD) Conference.

Engaging the Trust was a critical decision that ultimately leveraged profound results, but that was not enough. Although a community promoting inclusion of people with disabilities had begun to form among participating organizations, the network lacked some vital connections and infrastructure. FISA asked the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council (GPAC) to consider incorporating accessibility and inclusion into its professional development workshops. Subsequently, FISA awarded a grant of \$30,290 to support a series of workshops as well as accessibility audits for GPAC members. (The complete listing of workshops offered in 2011 is available on Page 11.)

Dee Delaney did retire in 2010, and Kristy Trautmann (FISA's program officer since 2004) succeeded her as FISA's second executive director.

“**Lesson 4: Capacity is key.** The concept of a “backbone” organization to support community collaborations is not new. Initially FISA assumed this role directly and later provided for it through grants. Engagement with two strategic partners – the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust and GPAC -- ultimately allowed a community and culture of access and inclusion to develop across many arts organizations.””

### **Year 3: Gaining Momentum**

2011 was a pivotal year for arts accessibility in Pittsburgh. The Trust was working on internal assessments of its venues and programming, and GPAC went through a strategic planning process and adopted accessibility as a core value. GPAC also announced a monthly Lunch and Learn series to promote arts accessibility. One of these sessions focused on captioning since VSA Pennsylvania had previously provided a new system for open captioning that was housed at City Theatre but available to the whole arts community. City Theatre had been using the system, but many other arts organizations in the community

were unaware that it was available for loan. So in February 2011, City Theatre, Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council and FISA Foundation co-sponsored a workshop entitled “Increasing and Serving New Audiences! How to Provide Free Captioning and Great Customer Service at Cultural Events” to teach local arts organizations how to use the system. The workshop also included a reminder about effective communication with people with disabilities, since this type of training is always needed.

2011 also marked the centennial anniversary for FISA Foundation’s predecessor organization, the Federation of Independent School Alumnae. FISA’s board wanted to celebrate the anniversary in a way that would honor the Foundation's work. "If we were going to invest resources in celebrating this milestone, we wanted to do something that would exemplify and further our mission," says Executive Director Kristy Trautmann. When the Foundation learned of GIMP, a work by Heidi Latsky Dance Company, they knew immediately that it was perfect. GIMP is a work of modern dance that includes dancers with all types of bodies, showcasing the abilities of each in unique and artistic ways. Trautmann explained, “You are captivated by the

art, the power, the mastery, and the fact that someone has missing limbs or an unusual gait becomes secondary and superfluous. It was exactly the vision of inclusion that we are working towards. We had to do it.”

### **Catalyst: GIMP, a production of Heidi Latsky Dance**

#### **Company**

FISA approached Paul Organisak, Executive Director of the Pittsburgh Dance Council, inviting him to join FISA as a producer and supported the performance through a grant of \$51,600 to the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust. In the end, GIMP was produced by a coalition of four organizations, including the Pittsburgh Dance Council, FISA Foundation, the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust and the August Wilson Center, where GIMP was staged on October 15, 2011.

“FISA has wonderful connections with the disability community, and we wanted our friends and colleagues to be able to attend and feel comfortable. In addition, we thought this was an opportunity to showcase as many of the accessibility accommodations as possible, integrating them seamlessly into

the experience, to demonstrate to local arts and cultural organizations what inclusion could look like,” Trautmann said.

To make it happen, a committee of more than 15 members from all four organizations met frequently. They talked about myriad issues involved in the event, including how to provide an optimal audience experience for people with a broad range of abilities and needs.

Some of the questions the group needed to address included:

What is the maximum number of wheelchair users who can be accommodated at the August Wilson Center if every removable seat were taken out? Will the infrared headsets accommodate assisted listening amplification on one channel and audio description on a second channel? Can the audio describer sit in the sound booth and talk aloud throughout the performance?

Where does the person keying in the open captioning need to sit, and how much room do we need to allow for that equipment?

Where is the closest accessible parking? Many of these considerations were new to committee members, but they remained engaged and enthusiastic and reported that it added to their store of knowledge about accessibility.

Paul Organisak, Executive Director of the Pittsburgh Dance Council, noticed that GIMP had attracted a "whole other audience," different from those who usually attend dance programs and something arts managers are continually seeking. Trautmann felt optimistic that GIMP would provide a spark for the arts accessibility movement in Pittsburgh and would quicken the pace towards greater accessibility, beckoning those with disabilities to fuller participation in the cultural arts.

To aid the momentum, FISA Foundation's board of directors used the ticket proceeds to establish the Dee Delaney Arts Accessibility Fund at the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council. GIMP proceeds, plus a small seed grant from FISA, funding from the Richard King Mellon Foundation and individual donations were used to later award modest grants to support small arts organizations in making accessibility improvements. The grants supported hiring American Sign Language interpreters, preparing large print and braille materials and purchasing assisted listening systems.

“**Lesson 5: Join in the risk taking.** By co-producing GIMP and inviting hundreds of disability advocates to the performance, FISA put its own reputation at stake. That deepened and cemented partnerships and accelerated learning.””

### **Allegheny Regional Asset District (RAD) Joins the Conversation in 2012**

In 1993, the Allegheny Regional Asset District (RAD) was created as a special purpose area-wide unit of local government that receives half of the one percent Allegheny County Sales and Use Tax (in 2013 nearly \$90 million). RAD is tasked with distributing funds to nearly ninety civic, cultural and recreational entities, libraries, parks, sports facilities and other local amenities. David Donahoe, Executive Director of RAD for more than a decade, recounts a moment of insight when his eyes were opened to the full significance of what it means to be an "accessible" location.

"I attended a meeting at the Carnegie Museum of Art," Donahoe said. "People there were discussing a program for training docents to give art tours for people with dementia. It started me

thinking that access means more than putting a ramp at the entrance of a building. As a funder, I realized I had taken a narrow view of the concept of accessibility."

"I still have much to learn," said Donahoe, referring to the issue of making Allegheny County resources more welcoming to people with disabilities. RAD had had a standing practice of requiring grant applicants to state whether or not their venues are accessible to people with a wide array of disabilities. But now, Donahoe began to wonder how else RAD could encourage grant seekers to exhibit a commitment to "access" in their funding requests.

RAD began alerting grantees to workshops offered by the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council (GPAC) that focus on matters of accessibility. He said, "RAD and GPAC co-hosted a meeting that included people who have physical disabilities. I was surprised to learn that, even in major venues, folks felt their arrivals often caused a panic. Seats had to be removed, the staff wasn't warned in advance, and people did not get that 'welcome' feeling. I wondered, is the information getting out? People [said] that not

as much is being communicated to those in need of services as should be."

As a result, "We're proposing that accessibility be part of each grant request, and part of the programming itself," said Donahoe. The 2014 funding application includes additional questions to applicants regarding their accessibility efforts. Donahoe explained, "I want to see access as an additional evaluative criteria for anyone who accepts money from RAD." Even though RAD does not have regulatory powers, the new emphasis on accessibility will stimulate grant-seekers to look anew at the real meaning of accessibility.

### **Raising the Bar: Creating Systemic Change (Years Four and Five: 2012 to 2013)**

FISA Foundation provided a grant of \$34,915 to GPAC to continue to support professional education for cultural arts presenters. The topics continue to evolve and participation has grown in the numbers of attendees and the diversity of participating cultural organizations. "In the early workshops we had about 20 people attending," Trautmann noted, "and now

there are 50 or 60 at a session, a good representation of all our arts organizations." Trautmann believes that formalizing the relationship and investing in GPAC's capacity to support accessibility as part of their work was an important change for both organizations.

After attending GPAC's 2012 workshops, seeing the level of engagement from the arts community, and hearing about the many accessibility improvements that had been implemented, Trautmann saw that it was time for FISA to shift its role. "It was no longer necessary for FISA to be engaged as an educator and advocate, working to convince local arts and cultural organizations to focus on accessibility. Many of them now know more about it than I do, and there are so many passionate accessibility champions that they will create their own momentum for moving forward. What FISA needs to do next is assist with letting the disability community know about all of the new accessibility options, to encourage people with disabilities to buy tickets and to enjoy this growing culture of inclusion!"

In December 2012, FISA and GPAC co-convened a meeting of 11 arts organizations and many leaders from the disability

community to share current and planned accessibility services and to strategize how to get the word out about accessible programs and venues. Planned as a two hour meeting, it took more than an hour and a half just for the arts organizations to share their updates on access and inclusion!

It was encouraging to learn that the commitment to access and inclusion was paying off. In a survey that GPAC sent to arts organizations involved in their educational programs since January 2012, 55 percent of respondents indicated that their organization has experienced increased engagement with patrons with disabilities, and 32 percent of organizations have experienced an increase in their volunteers with disabilities.

Today, there is a thriving community of arts leaders committed to learning together. The Trust and GPAC convene regular peer learning meetings for the whole cultural community. "We get together on a regular basis to discuss issues and programs. It happens organically, because we communicate with each other," commented Al Rodibaugh, Director of Guest Services at the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust. "The more we know," said Marilyn Egan of the Pittsburgh Opera, "the better it is for all patrons."

Egan added that she feels rewarded by the response to accessibility efforts and that her message to the community is this: "Listen to your public. Learn what they want and enjoy when they come to a performance."

The movement for inclusivity in Pittsburgh is strong and healthy, but still growing. It exists not only within each organization or venue, but it is strengthened by community-wide efforts to make our city welcoming and hospitable for all patrons. "We are cultivating the audience of the future," said Kristen Link, Director of Education and Accessibility at City Theatre. To learn about ongoing developments at various organizations, consult the GPAC website.

*([www.pittsburghartscouncil.org](http://www.pittsburghartscouncil.org); under Learning in the top navigation menu, you will find Accessibility. These pages include numerous resources, upcoming events, as well as accommodations currently being provided by local arts organizations.)*

**“Lesson 6: Be willing to revise the Theory of Change.** In 2009, FISA believed the economic argument for welcoming people with disabilities as a new audience would motivate

change. That conviction was emboldening and led the Foundation to be much more intentional than before about outreach to cultural organizations. But in the end, two other factors were much more transformative: *becoming educated* and *acquiring specific skills*. Once arts managers became aware of the barriers and had practical strategies they could implement, things started to change. The momentum didn't come from economic gain, it was ultimately about values.'”

“**Lesson 7: Encourage Peer Pressure** The local arts managers who attended the 2012 LEAD conference reported an interesting phenomenon when they returned to their jobs—their bosses became much more interested in accessibility work when they learned that so many other local cultural organizations attended also. As the larger cultural institutions invest in accessibility, their peers begin to worry that they are falling behind. This positive peer pressure created by our regional effort helps accessibility champions build support within their organizations.’”

## **Looking forward: Next steps**

Trautmann readily admits, “Pittsburgh’s arts and cultural community is not fully accessible. This initiative has accomplished a great deal, but is still very much a work in progress. We’re proud of how far we’ve come together and yet we are not nearly where we aspire to be.”

So, what is next to advance the gains made in arts accessibility in Pittsburgh? According to Trautmann, “FISA plans to continue the core elements that are already in process: providing professional development opportunities, sending local arts managers to the LEAD conference, supporting each arts organization to continue pursuing its own accessibility/inclusion plan. Of course, there is a lot more that could be done.”

Trautmann has a good number of ideas percolating including:

- **Customer service training is an ONGOING need**

Receptionists, cashiers, ticket takers, ushers, docents, and concession stand workers are the front line of customer service.

An organization can be fully supportive of accessibility and

inclusion, but if the staff member or volunteer providing assistance is not well trained to serve people with disabilities, then other efforts can be easily negated. While challenging to implement, committing to ongoing training is essential to this effort.

- **Better marketing**

The websites of many local cultural organizations now prominently contain information on accessibility for visitors, but the goal is to see that information integrated into mainstream marketing efforts. Rather than “special” materials and outreach strategies to reach the disability community, it would be preferable to have every brochure, press release and poster contain references to accessibility features as a matter of course. As Trautmann explains, “It’s a matter of universal design. Curb cuts were developed to assist people who use wheelchairs, but they have made navigation easier for parents with strollers and delivery people, too. Marketing the availability of accessible features doesn’t just attract new audiences, it helps to retain patrons as they age. Large-print programs, assisted listening, captioning and other accommodations are helpful to so many

who don't necessarily think of themselves as having a disability.”

- **Pittsburgh will host two “Autism-friendly” performances in the fall of 2013**

The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust will host a matinee of *The Lion King* and the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre will sponsor a performance of *The Nutcracker* for families of people with autism and other disabilities. Both shows include minor adjustments to the performance itself (the elimination of strobe lighting, softening of loud or sudden sound or light cues, etc.) but the script and story line are intact. All customer service staff will be trained to be sensitive to the needs of people with autism and other disabilities, thus creating a more welcoming environment at future performances. Trautmann hopes that families who attend and have a good experience will feel positive about attending other mainstream cultural events in the future.

Over time, FISA's goal is to move towards “relaxed performances” which provide some of the same

accommodations but are open to the entire community. This is a more universal model and is intended to welcome people with disabilities but also families with young children, young adults, and anyone who prefers a more informal environment to enjoy performances.

- **Engaging more people with disabilities as artists, volunteers, staff and donors**

Full inclusion demands that in addition to welcoming patrons with disabilities, more people with disabilities are integrated into all roles within arts organizations.

- **Engaging other funders in supporting and promoting accessibility and inclusion as part of their diversity initiatives**

Many foundations that fund the arts have a deep commitment to diversity and inclusion. Disability needs to be seen as part of the diversity agenda. The Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council is currently working with funders to encourage arts organizations to add the cost of programmatic accommodations as a normal

budget line item in all grant requests. This shifts the thinking of accessibility as a separate or special program to a normal part of business as usual. The changes RAD is making to its application process are a good illustration of what is possible.

- **Collect and Share Data**

When FISA began this initiative in earnest in 2009, the Foundation was armed with data about the number of people with disabilities in the community, the aging of the local population, and some national data about the spending power of people with disabilities. Now that Pittsburgh is regularly offering a broad range of accommodations, there is an opportunity to collect data about usage. It is now possible to track the number of people requesting accommodations, and then extrapolate about whether this translates to new audience development or audience retention. If, over time, the data suggests that new audiences of people with disabilities are purchasing tickets that would powerfully support the economic argument for inclusion.

Data could support replication of this type of community approach – whether in other cities or to other sectors (sports and leisure, for instance).



### **Postscript**

For the second year in a row, a Pittsburgh arts manager will receive the national Emerging Leader Award at the LEAD Conference. In 2012, the three person accessibility team at the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust was honored. This year Alyssa Herzog Melby from Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre will receive the award. To have the same region honored in two consecutive years by an international cohort of accessibility peers demonstrates the impressive work happening here.

In addition, Betty Siegel, Director of Accessibility at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts describes the work happening in Pittsburgh as a model for other regions and highlights the attributes of this initiative that have spurred such

rapid change: *“The Pittsburgh arts community has come together in a unique way to address being inclusive of people with disabilities across agencies, venues, and organizations. The effort to be accessible has come about through the natural dedication of cultural leaders to invest in the future and to empower their colleagues and staff to invest themselves in creating accessible cultural experiences.”*

**“Lesson 7: Commit for the long haul.** While this report has outlined great progress and many accomplishments, social change work continues to evolve. There is always a next step. As a small foundation, FISA has been able to support significant change by maintaining a narrow focus for many years. The Foundation actively seeks to learn from its experiences and make changes along the way. FISA is excited to see what happens next.”

**Grantee Perspective: Tiffany Wilhelm, Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council**

When FISA Foundation initially approached GPAC about becoming a partner to promote accessibility and inclusion, we were nervous. We certainly supported the idea philosophically, but our plate was already full. Plus we knew (through surveys), that while accessibility was understood to be important among our members, it wasn't being prioritized by most organizations. With that in mind, GPAC had a choice—to take a leadership role and elevate the issue's level of priority in the community or to respond to other expressed needs instead. Ultimately, GPAC accepted FISA's invitation to design and host the program. Knowing that our capacity and internal accessibility expertise was limited, Dee Delaney (then executive director) encouraged us to simply host and promote educational events. She helped us connect to consultants with technical expertise who could assist with program planning or serve as speakers. The suggestion to use outside expertise made the project more manageable to consider, so we moved forward with the grant.

But after some initial planning and the first couple of workshops, something didn't feel right. We realized that without developing some of our own internal capacity and expertise, we would not be able to help our community move forward. The issues were too important and complex. Throughout this process, we had an active working relationship with FISA Program Officer, Anne Mulgrave. Through Anne, FISA contributed content expertise while GPAC brought knowledge about how to engage the local arts community. Together, we decided that a mid-course correction was needed.

We redesigned the workshops using a new “recipe.” Instead of simply showcasing accessibility experts, we created a more engaged model for learning. Every session was led by a team comprised of an accessibility expert, a member of the local arts community who was able to share practical experiences about implementing accessibility improvements, and an individual with a disability who could bring a personal perspective to the problems and solutions. At one session, staff from a local museum talked about the process of designing accessible exhibits by creating a life-size template with masking tape, and

then making adjustments to improve the flow of traffic and sight lines for people using wheelchairs. For a session on accessible websites, a speaker with a vision impairment demonstrated how he navigates websites using a screen reader. The practicality of these sessions was very appealing. Participants said they began to feel that it was possible to make improvements rather than simply feeling overwhelmed.

Making these changes in the workshops required changing the grant budget partway through the year. Typically, we don't have the opportunity to work with a funder this closely. Having FISA as a partner allowed us to learn from what we were doing, adapt our plan partway through, and reallocate resources in a way we thought would be more effective. Too often grantees feel locked into completing a project as it was conceptualized in the initial proposal, even after learning that an adjustment would work better.

In the end, the new workshop model took a great deal more time and effort than we initially expected. But investing and developing our own internal expertise has been worth it. During the last year we were able to truly add capacity by creating a new position, Manager of Grants and Accessibility Programs.

Accessibility is part of the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council's current strategic plan. It has become a core part of our work and our identity in the community.

### **Accessibility and Inclusion at the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust**

The Trust has established a three-person team to guide accessibility efforts, encouraged in part by FISA's grant in 2010. Al Rodibaugh, Director of Guest Services; Eric Thomas, Assistant Director of Volunteer Services and Customer Services; and Vanessa Braun, Manager of Employee Engagement and Director of Accessibility all see inclusion as a natural extension of good customer service.

Braun, who is visually impaired, has been working on a new ADA-mandated ticketing process which makes it possible to buy accessible seats online. Today, there is an Accessibility Welcome Center in the lobby of the Benedum. Patrons have access to both large print and braille programs, and the Broadway Series has an American Sign Language interpreter for at least one performance during each run. The Benedum has purchased a

less intrusive closed captioning system which will replace open captioning next year. In addition, the Benedum purchased 90 new infrared listening headsets, moving 35 older-style headsets to the Byham Theater.

Thomas has been training the box office staff to be more conscious of what purchasers need. "We have been retraining everybody who sells tickets to listen to what a person wants," he said. "The most important message we give them is: *never say no*. If you don't understand the question, you can pass the phone call over to me!"

These efforts to advance the Trust's accessibility efforts have brought the organization acclaim. In 2012, the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust was recognized with the Kennedy Center's Award for Emerging Leaders "for making the cultural arts inclusive and accessible to people with disabilities and older adults."

"The three of us are so happy and proud of what the Trust has accomplished in the past year," said Braun. "Accessibility has become part of people's consciousness. When a new project or idea comes up, people in the Trust will ask, 'Are we being

inclusive of the entire disability community?" Braun is grateful to the Trust leadership, saying "They haven't said no to anything yet." Rodibaugh, however, warns against too much self-satisfaction: "We have massive 'to do' lists for each venue, and now we must start building a timeline for next year, the next three years, the next ten years. These are really old buildings, and that makes it very difficult."

### **Accessibility Champion: Kristen Link, Director of Education and Accessibility at City Theatre**

City Theatre has been in the forefront of accessible services, offering braille and large print programs, open captions, American Sign Language interpretation, and ticketing policies that are ADA compliant. Kristen Link, with a master's degree in theatre education, currently leads these efforts. She believes that people with disabilities, in particular those who are deaf or visually impaired, can have deeply satisfying experiences at the theatre. In addition to audio description, patrons with low vision or blindness are invited to preshow sessions to learn what to

look for or listen for in the upcoming performance. Patrons can walk on stage, touch the props and explore the set. Actors help them identify the voice of each character, and describers read the program notes aloud. Patrons who need accessible resources can buy two tickets for \$22, one for themselves and one for a companion.

Link says, "I very much enjoy working with and for people with disabilities, and have been working with these communities in one capacity or another for the past 15 years. As a child growing up with an invisible disability, it is a subject that is deeply personal and close to my heart. When I pursued a career in theatre education and outreach, it was always my intention to use my knowledge and skill sets to serve people with disabilities."

**Accessibility Champion: Mary Ann Perkins, Docent  
Coordinator at the Carnegie Museum of Art**

In the spring of 2008, I got a call from Presbyterian Senior Care in Oakmont, called Woodside Place, asking if they could bring a group of patients with Alzheimer disease and other dementias to the museum for a tour. I initially said no, but later asked myself why we couldn't. My mind opened up. I picked a particular docent to do the tour. We began to work with Woodside every month at Carnegie Museum, and I learned that this would be a process.

The group includes six Woodside residents and one caregiver. These visitors are not early stage Alzheimer's. Three may be more responsive on a given day than the other three. The art therapist at Woodside Place became a part of the discussion of what art can do.

Before the tour the docent selects a particular theme, and the art that reflects that theme. We go to the galleries for a full hour. We want to create the most wonderful experience for our guests.

This experience has changed my personal life and my professional life. Art is powerful for everyone. Last year I was received a scholarship from GPAC to the 2012 Leadership and Exchange in Arts and Disability conference. I was very energized and brought all my ideas and excitement back to my department. GPAC and FISA provide us with a wonderful forum for learning from one another. I'm very pleased with the attention to accessibility in Pittsburgh.

**Accessibility Champion: Alyssa Herzog Melby, Director of Education and Community Engagement at Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre**

I started working at Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre in 2011. We are the resident ballet company at the Benedum Center. We can use some accessible features and assisted listening devices, but we did not have audio description.

During my first year of employment, I attended GPAC workshops, including one on how to do audio description. My

goal was to personally offer audio description for *The Nutcracker* in December 2012. In dance there are no words to propel the story along. The movements become a story, an image in the mind.

Before the *The Nutcracker* performance, we held a sensory seminar on stage. We created tactile maps to let people with visual impairments understand the layout of the stage. We outlined the scenery with puff paint. People suggested using a doll and some of them loved its three-dimensional quality. We had a costumed ballerina there. Patrons could feel the point of her shoes and the strength of the ballerina's calves when en pointe.

What I'm proudest of is that I was able to provide audio description to patrons in conjunction with the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust. It was a joint effort. In December, the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre is planning an autism-friendly performance of *The Nutcracker*. I think it will be the first autism-friendly dance performance in the nation.

“”Joyce Driben, an arts patron who has never had sight, had the opportunity to attend an audio described performance of *The Nutcracker* and attended the sensory workshop before the performance. When Joyce felt the tulle of the ballerina’s tutu, she exclaimed, “I had no idea that the tutu looked like this!” Joyce was also able to explore a tactile map of the sets used during the ballet. After the show, Joyce exclaimed excitedly, “Well it wasn’t perfect, but I just watched my first ballet!”””

**Testimonials from local disability self-advocates:**

“Over the last couple of years, I have noticed a significant improvement in the knowledge base of the people in the ticketing office. When I call to purchase tickets and alert the ticket service representative to my disability, the person I am speaking with knows what to do.”

-Chaz Kellem

“It has been my great pleasure to see the changes that have been made to increase inclusion of people with disabilities into Pittsburgh’s arts and cultural organizations. When I recently went online to purchase tickets for a play, I was thrilled to see that there was a page on the website devoted to accessibility information. It was clear and straightforward and told me exactly what was available and who to call for more information.”

-Lucy Spruill

## **Credits:**

Interviews conducted by Barbara Paull.

FISA Foundation would like to thank all of the arts and cultural organizations that have participated in some way in advancing accessibility and inclusion. We regret that it is not possible to give individual credit to all participating organizations in this report.

This report is available in Braille, large print and digital formats. Contact FISA Foundation to request an alternate format.

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