

BEYOND SIGHT FOUNDATION DISABILITY EQUALITY POLICY

The vision for the Beyond Sight Foundation (BSF) is to create a permeable organisation that promote disability equality by removing access barriers in its programmes, exhibition and offer employment opportunities that are open to all. **Disability Equality Policy (DEP) of BSF is exclusively for the visually impaired people and their experience of art and popular culture.** Our Disability Equality Policy and action plan ensure that the access needs of the visually impaired people are included in BSF' thinking, not as an afterthought or even an obligation but as an intrinsic part of our plans and vision.

Definition of Access for BSF

BSF's approach to access for visually impaired people is part of a broader diversity strategy of the foundation. This defines diversity as about and for everyone. It encompasses the removal of barriers, defined in six categories – physical, sensory, intellectual, cultural, attitudinal and financial thereby establishing an inclusive approach. BSF promotes a social rather than a medical approach to disability access. This approach considers how the environment contributes to a person's disability rather than defining people by their impairment.

Scope of Disability Equality Policy

Scope of Disability Equality Policy is defined in line with BSF's vision - social inclusion of people with visually impairment through the experiences of arts, access to art practices and reduces the gap between the visually impaired and the sighted people.

Our initiative to encourage visually impaired people to experience art and popular culture by building capacity around the “Non-Retinal” Art culture has cascade impact in promoting disability equality in broader sense like –

- Promote equality of opportunity between visually impaired persons and other persons.
- Eliminate discrimination which is unlawful.
- Eliminate harassment of visually impaired persons that is related to their disabilities.
- Promote positive attitudes towards visually impaired persons.
- Encourage participation by visually impaired persons in public life.
- Take steps to take account of visually impaired person's disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons.

To achieve our vision will take time, effort and determination to implement the best of practice and BSF would -

- carry out impact assessments
- collect and study evidence and identify and address gaps
- prioritise actions
- involve disabled people
- let people know what we are doing
- set an example to others
- train our staff on disability equality issues and our DEP
- work with others to deliver disability equality

Practices & Guideline for Access to Art for the Visually Impaired

1. Braille

This is a method of reading by touch. A large percentage of visually impaired or blind people in India use Braille. Braille does not have to be exact letter / word copy of print but should give the same information. There are two grades of Braille. Grade I is simple and involves letter by letter transcription. It is used for single words. Grade II Braille includes special signs for combinations of letters. It is used for multi-word signs and information. Separate Braille codes are used for foreign languages, science or computer programs.

2. Tactile (touch & feel) pictures

Tactile diagrams are images formed by raised areas on a flat surface, used in conjunction with detailed verbal descriptions. Tactile images are created by printing black and white designs onto swell paper (also known as microcapsule paper), and then heating it in a tactile image enhancer so that the black areas (which absorb heat faster) raise up and create a relief version of the design.

Tactile images are not exact reproductions of the visual image, but reinterpretations of the visual image into a tactile language. Audio descriptions that accompany the images guide the user across its surface in a clear and logical way. It is suggested that the narrative begins at one of the image's corners or outer edges. From this starting point, the narrative works inward in an orderly progression. In addition, the narrative will provide a detailed description of the original work.

Tactile images are designed to provide blind and visually impaired people with a reference point that can be accessed independently through touch. It brings photographs to life for those dependent on senses other than sight. Tactile images can be useful for blind and visually impaired people to gain a clear understanding of the composition of a photograph, which in some cases is where the strength of an image lies. Feeling a tactile diagram with guidance so that the different elements can be identified can consolidate the precise layout of the frame and lead to interesting discussion about the choices made by the photographer or artists.

It is vitally important to note that a tactile image of a photograph is only understandable if accompanied by an audio guide explaining how to interpret it. Somebody with access to the original image can provide direct guidance. Shapes can represent any number of things and when separated from clues as to their distance, colour, texture etc, cannot be identified by touch alone. When explored once with guidance, however, a tactile diagram becomes a reference that can be revisited and experienced just as one might revisit a favourite photo in an album.

3. Audio description

Audio description commonly known as AD, it captures the visual elements of a theatre piece, painting or environment for visually impaired and blind people. In the gallery setting, it combines picture description with cultural and historical information. It may be given directly to the visually impaired person or through a recording. The narrative provide a detailed description of the original work and give emphasis on the perceptive, shapes of object, foreground, background, distance, colour, expressions and features which are not revealed by touch.

4. **Audio Description for Tactile image**

When providing a guide to interpretation of a tactile diagram, it is important to be as methodical as in the description of the camera. Start from a clearly identifiable reference point such as the bottom left corner, and work through the diagram without requiring the person accessing it to jump across details. Ensure that for each shape you encounter, you describe what it represents first, then whether it is in the foreground or background, and then the details such as color, expression and features. Be sure to explain if the subject is cut off by the edge of the frame, so that the shape makes sense.

5. **Caption & Large printed material**

The discussion between photographer and trainer during review of “final” picture brings out the “insight” – creative experience, feels and emotions of the photographers. These can be translated into meaning by creating a caption for each photograph. Captioning is a particularly important part of the project as it ensures that the photograph conveys the experience or story the photographer wants to share. The photo cannot completely represent the experience the photographer was having and wished to record, since it captures the visual alone. Captioning helps in interpretation of the image and guide discussion of the image in light of the photographer's experience and intentions.

Captioning in exhibition is done in Braille and accessible large print formats. Some of the guidelines for using large print are – avoid glossy paper, use of contrast (preferable to use black on off white), font size should be a minimum of 18 point, do not use italics, the space between one line and the next should be at least 1.5 to 2 times, the space between the words on the line, avoid placing lettering onto an image and general design should be simple, uncluttered and unfussy.

6. **Exhibition Design**

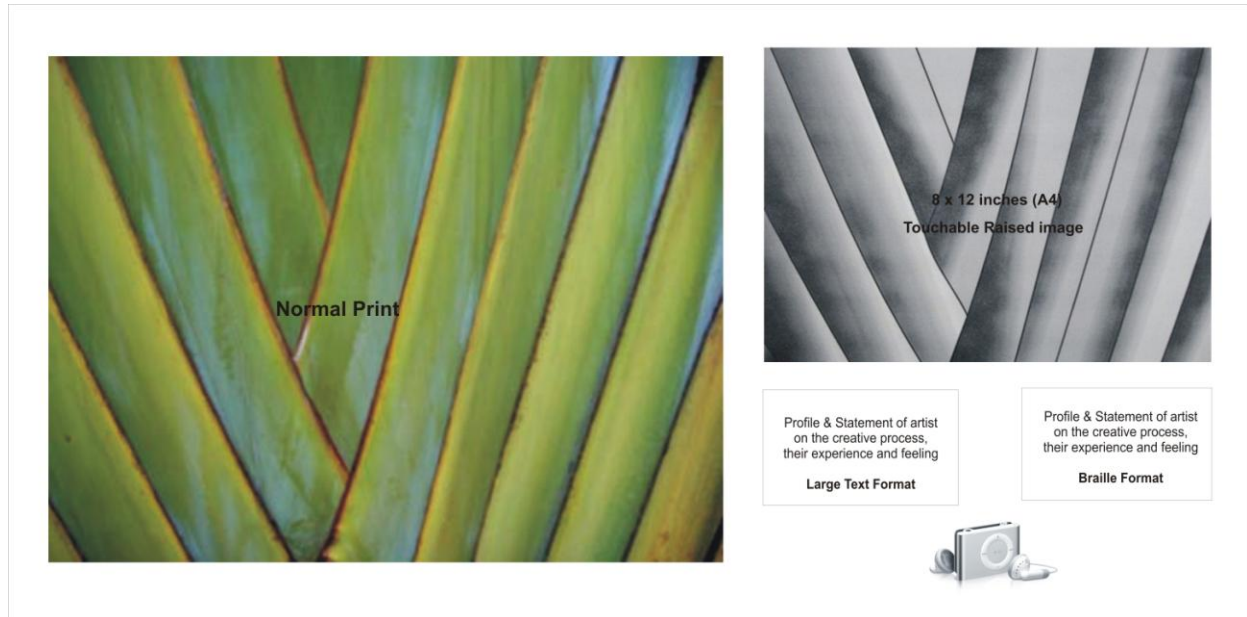
Accessibility demands inclusive exhibition design and interpretation so that everyone shares equally in experience and enjoyment. Considering that everyone is different, a holistic approach in BSF's exhibitions would provide intellectual, physical and sensory inclusion to the visually impaired and sighted visitors.

- **Approach** to accessibility to photographs / art in exhibition to be guided by -
 - ❖ Accessibility is built right at the point of entry for the visually impaired coming to the exhibition - create a sense of welcome.
 - ❖ Trained volunteers guide the visually impaired to the information desk, and they are given exhibition material in an accessible form (Braille, large format and audio description on CD).
 - ❖ Visually impaired get verbal instructions from volunteers about access facilities available at the exhibition, where they are placed and how they work.
 - ❖ Access facility / adaptive ways to access photographs are easy to understand and operate for the visually impaired visitors independently.
 - ❖ Volunteers would accompany visually impaired visitor who might want someone to them, to describe things or help move through the galleries.
 - ❖ Get feedback from the visually impaired visitors and encourage a relationship beyond the exhibition.

- **Display of Picture**

Considerations and guidance for display of exhibits are –

- ❖ Each exhibit having five elements - a normal print, corresponding tactile (touch & feel) picture, large print labels, Braille footnote and MP3 player would be arranged together as shown below



- ❖ Pictures should hang at height in consideration for wheelchair users as well as people standing (particularly for touching the raised images).
- ❖ Consider there is enough viewing distance from pictures without obstacles.
- ❖ Viewing of work from low height, considering there are seating arrangements for disabled visitors in the galleries.
- ❖ All exhibits are numbered in large print and in Braille.
- ❖ MP3 is fixed on display wall / board, so visitor's hands are free for touching raised picture.
- ❖ IPOD style MP3 are easy to operations, it has play, pause, stop, forward & rewind, volume.
- ❖ Each MP3 player has two headphones to avoid waiting for visitors.
- ❖ Each exhibit will have one MP3 player with audio track relevant to that picture only.
- ❖ Few MP3 players with audio tracks of all photographs and arrange in the sequence the display of exhibits. Experienced visitors can change track and listen to the appropriate audio by following the large print and Braille numbering on the exhibits.
- ❖ Any audio - video display as part of the exhibition to be done in separated out space from the main display hall. Low volume to be maintained to avoid disturbance to visitors view the exhibits.

Above exhibition design and accessibility practices is ideal and possible in a mainstream art gallery and art museums that provide required infrastructure support. Exhibition in non conventional space like foyer outside conference hall pose a huge challenge to implement all access facility and demands reworking to scale down to give the audience a feel of what we are doing on accessibility of art for the visually impaired people

7. Curatorial

When engaging a curator(s) for exhibition, ensure that exhibitions and displays are conceived, planned and presented in a way that maximises access for people with disabilities. Standards practices are -

- Provide works which can be touched.
- Provide transcripts for all audio material in the gallery.
- Ensure that seating is available in all galleries.
- Information captions for all displays and exhibitions should be available in large print in the galleries.
- When curating a display or exhibition, ensure that curators are aware of references to disability in an artwork or in an artist's life and times. This reference does not need to be highlighted but should not be hidden.
- Consider the experiences and interests of disabled visitors when curating a show. The issues raised should be discussed from the outset of the project and integrated, in appropriate language, in text written for the show and in the way the show is designed.
- Include people with disabilities in the selection and interpretation of content. Positive representation of disability in artworks or interpretation helps create an inclusive display.
- Be pro-active in asking owners or the artist permission to touch their work. Consider where appropriate editions of works that could allow one for handling or for reproduction in collaboration with the artist

8. Education Programmes

Ensure that all programmes of BSF are conceived, planned and presented in a way that maximises access for people with visual disabilities. BSF offer provision for visually impaired people can be integrated within mainstream and specialized programmes. Standard practices to be followed are -

- Participants should be asked for their access requirements when they register for programmes.
- All education and gallery activities should be held in spaces that are accessible.
- Talks that are not dependent on slides or visual support may be of interest to visually impaired, but for and deaf – blind participants arrange for a sign language interpreter in advance.
- Include disabled people in the delivery of programme sessions.
- Provide a programme of events which are specifically for deaf-blind people.
- Provide a transcript of talks on request wherever possible.
- Provide picture description tours and where possible touch tours of permanent exhibitions and heritage sites.
- Train all volunteers, educators and staffs contacting programmes has disability awareness and communication tactics.
- Programme provision should take into account different learning styles and the needs of visually impaired / deaf-blind people by providing a variety of approaches including a multi-sensory approach.

9. Digital Communication

Digital information can be used to open up access to a wide range of disabled audiences provided the design and technology used are carefully considered. Website design and web sites of BSF are visually impaired friendly.

10. Information Systems

Ensure that the procurement, design and implementation of Information System (IS) systems takes into account the needs of people with disabilities. Develop and set standards that all future systems must meet to ensure accessibility and usability. Review and update IT support services to ensure that they fully meet the needs of disabled users, including providing appropriate training to IT support staff.

11. Human Resources

Ensure that the content and application of all people policies supports disabled employees. BSF offer equal employment opportunity to the disable people and follows practices as mentioned below -

- Key employment policies to be impact assessed to ensure that they take account of the needs of disabled people and promote disability equality, where appropriate.
- Ensure the regular collection of data to establish more accurate levels of disability reporting, encouraging staff to disclose their disability if they wish.
- Recruitment procedures to be kept under review to ensure that they are supporting our aim to attract a more diverse workforce with more people with disabilities working at all levels within BSF.
- Procedures to be in place to measure how many people with disabilities are applying for posts at BSF.
- Ensure that staffs of BSF are equipped with the knowledge and skills to promote disability equality both in their own work.
- Provide training to staffs on disability equality as part of the core training programme.
- Embed disability equality in all training undertaken at BSF.
- Disable employees are equal partners and contributors in BSF operation.