

AcrossRCA: Caring Society

RCA 2023

# Making Art Galleries

and Museum Spaces Accessible  
for the visually impaired & blind.

Kimberley Burrows, Shaden Almutlaq, Elijah Emerald & Alhaan Ahmed.



## Problem Statement

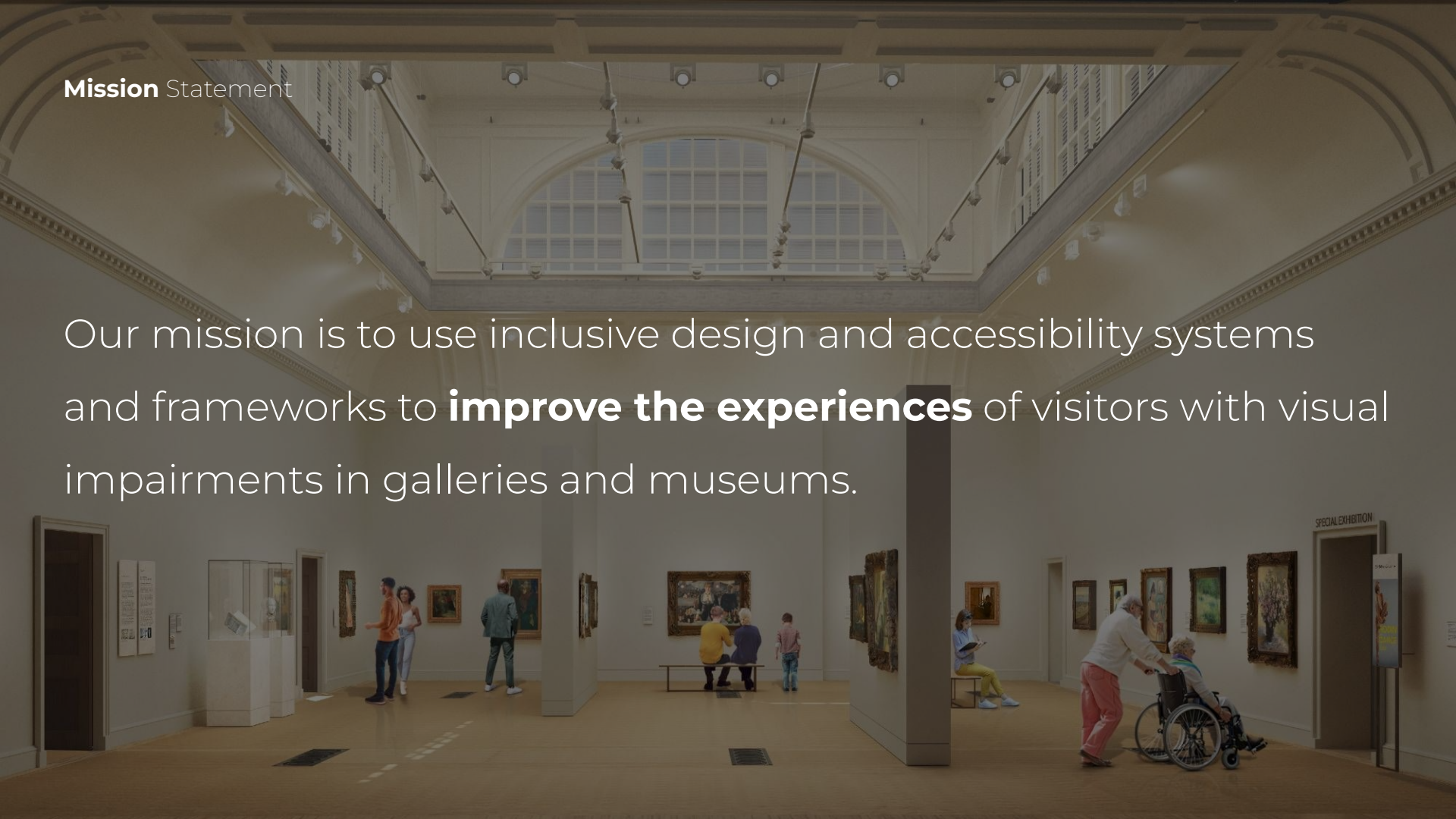
How might we support **galleries** and museums to be more accessible and **inclusive** towards visitors with **visual impairments**?





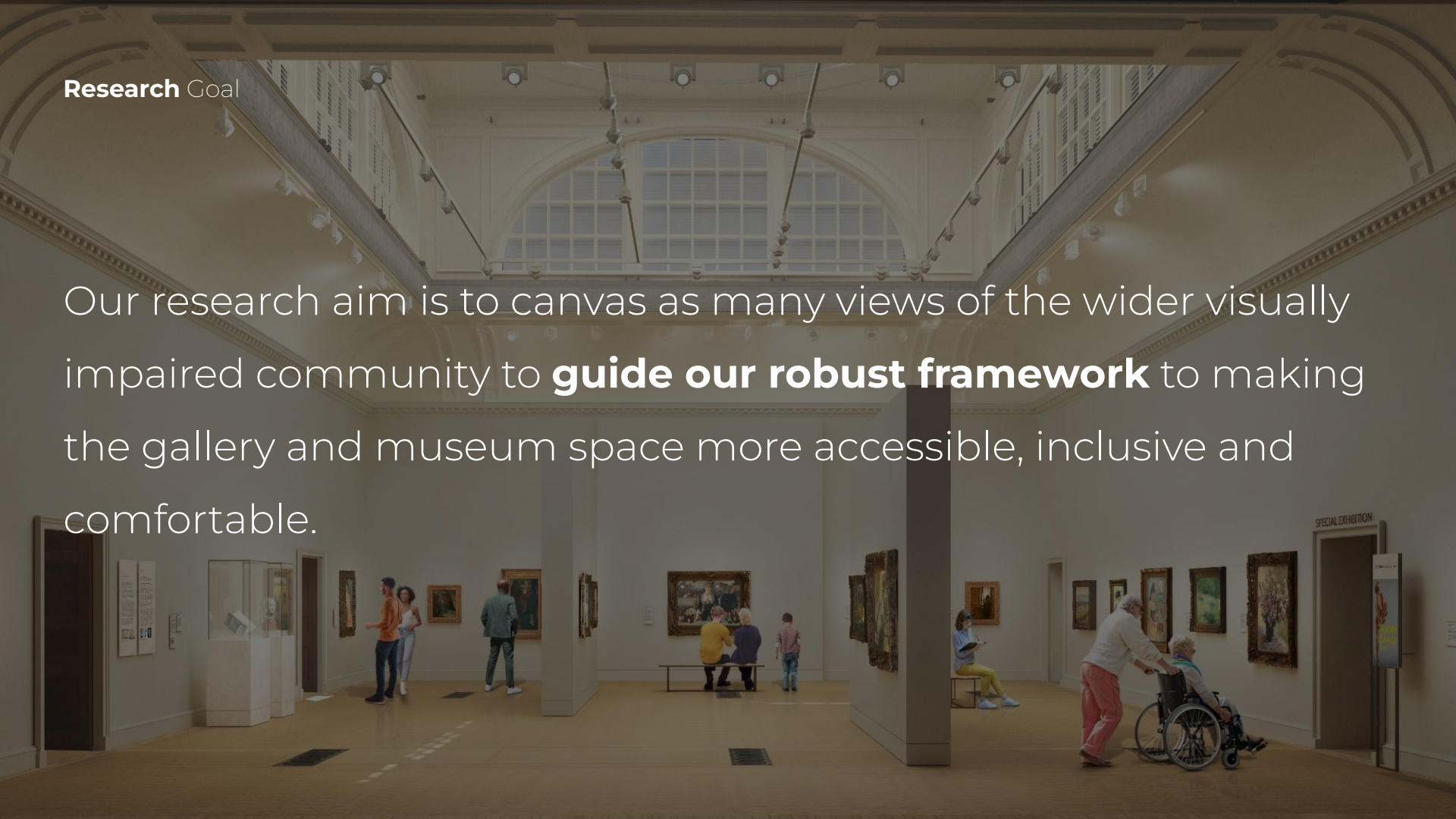
## Mission Statement

Our mission is to use inclusive design and accessibility systems and frameworks to **improve the experiences** of visitors with visual impairments in galleries and museums.



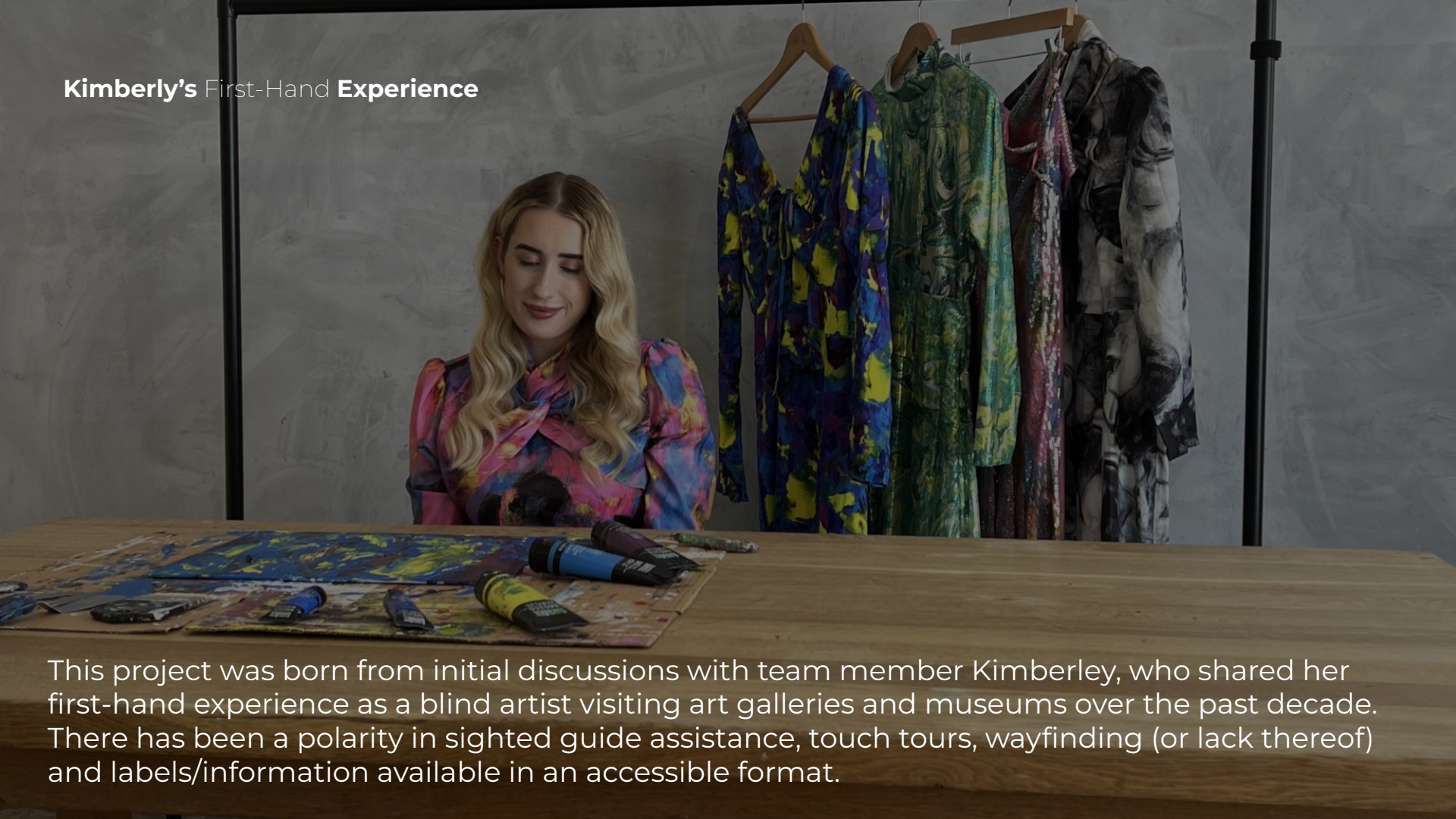
## Research Goal

Our research aim is to canvas as many views of the wider visually impaired community to **guide our robust framework** to making the gallery and museum space more accessible, inclusive and comfortable.





## Kimberly's First-Hand Experience



This project was born from initial discussions with team member Kimberly, who shared her first-hand experience as a blind artist visiting art galleries and museums over the past decade. There has been a polarity in sighted guide assistance, touch tours, wayfinding (or lack thereof) and labels/information available in an accessible format.

## What is Accessibility?

**The fact of being able to be reached or obtained easily :**

*Two new roads are being built to increase accessibility **to** the town centre.*

*The accessibility of online information is an important consideration.*

**The quality of being able to be entered or used by everyone, including people who have a disability:**

*The theater offers full wheelchair accessibility.*

*We carried out a full audit of the office building's accessibility.*

Source: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/accessibility>

## What is Accessibility? A Wider Understanding

“When I talk about accessibility, I’m using it to mean that people are not excluded from using something on the basis of experiencing a disability. Accessibility means that people can do what they need to do in a similar amount of time and effort as someone that does not have a disability. It means that people are empowered, can be independent, and will not be frustrated by something that is poorly designed or implemented.” Alistair Duggin - Gov.uk

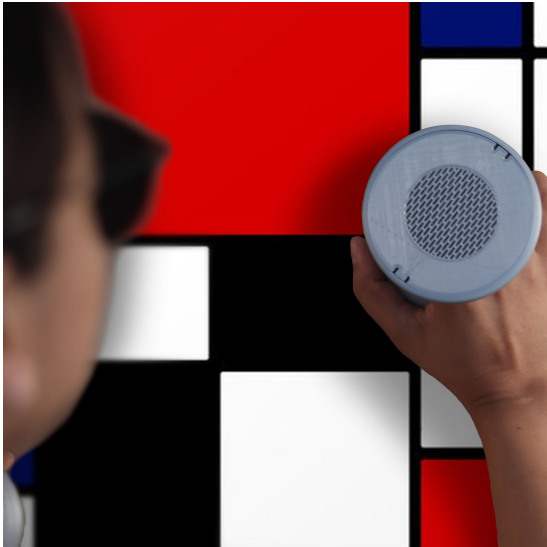
- Our understanding of accessibility is generally too narrow
- Something can be accessible to one person while being inaccessible to others
- It is lack of awareness that most commonly results in things being inaccessible
- Disability, and sight loss, is a spectrum
- For something to be accessible someone needs to be able to complete the task they are trying to achieve without encountering a barrier or issue
- Accessibility is a broad topic that requires specialist knowledge

Source: <https://accessibility.blog.gov.uk/2016/05/16/what-we-mean-when-we-talk-about-accessibility-2/>

## Research: Examples of **Existing Solutions**

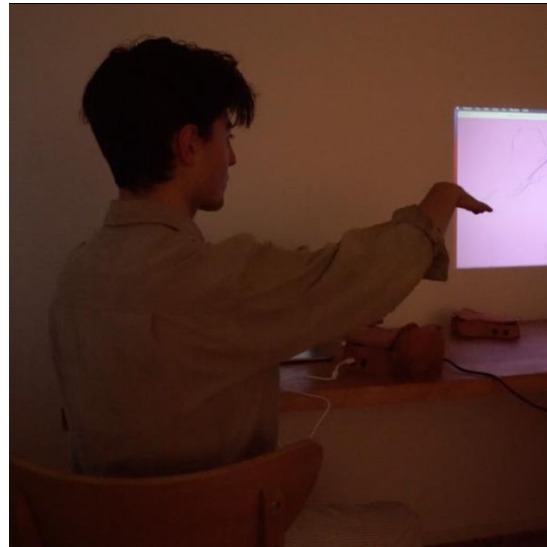
### **Nexus**

A sensorial device that allows the visually impaired to interact & experience paintings.



### **'Cine-sthetics'**

Experimental research project in embodied cognition & interactive sensory animation.



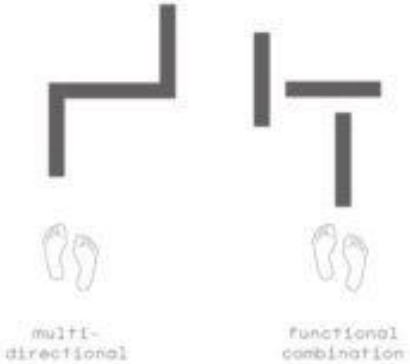
### **RightHear**

Wayfinding system that uses audio to read signage and direct spatial orientation



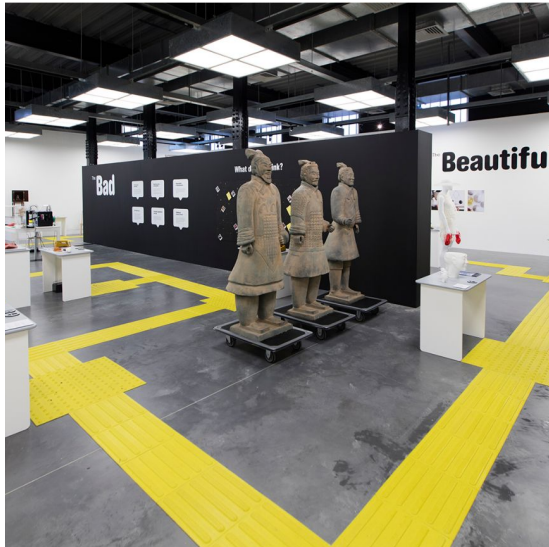


In floor Wayfinding designed by **So & So Studio** using tactile tiles

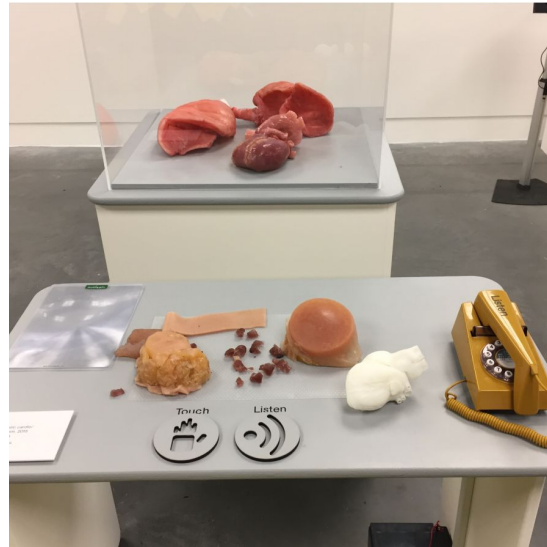


Co-created **multisensory exhibition** at the National Centre with blind and partially sighted participants.

## Wayfinding & navigation lines



## Multi-sensorial desks with **tangible** items



## Multi-sensorial desks with **audio descriptors**



We searched what is considered an accessible art gallery or museum space and came across this article on the **Be My Eyes** website. Be My Eyes is an app designed for blind and visually impaired people to help assist them in everyday life. Kimberley uses the app on her phone from time to time.

## **10 Accessible Art and Museum Experiences for People who are Blind or Low Vision**

<https://www.bemyeyes.com/blog/10-accessible-art-and-museum-experiences>

By Cecilie Skou Andersen, Comms Officer

Second on the list was the **Victoria and Albert Museum** in London:

“About once a month, the V&A offers a tour specifically for visitors with a vision impairment. The program changes every month and focuses on some of the different V&A exhibitions. On December 7th, the V&A has a descriptive talk and tour of their car exhibition, where you can learn more about the role of the car through history and what impact cars have had on our world. The V&A’s touch and descriptive tours are free, but you’ll need to book in advance to participate, as the tours have limited spots. Besides the tours, the V&A offers extensive accessibility info online, guiding services, braille books and audio descriptions, as well as a multi-sensory backpack that allows blind children to explore the museum through multi-sensory activities.”

[\*\*Events for the Blind and Visually Impaired at the V&A\*\*](#)  
[\*\*V&A Accessibility Information\*\*](#)



With this in mind, we visited galleries and museums to see **how accessible the spaces were**. We all visited the V&A and had varied experiences.

## Layers of Vision

King's College



## In Plain Sight

Wellcome Collection



## Victoria & Albert

Museum & Gallery



Shaden	Kimberley	Alhaan	Elijah
<p>Touch tours needed to be booked in advance and are not available for all rooms.</p>	<p>Had difficulty booking a sighted guide in a suitable time frame to visit the exhibition she initially wanted to. Missed that exhibition as a result.</p>	<p>Lack of tactile exhibits: Many exhibits are visual only and do not provide tactile experiences for the visually impaired visitors to explore the art.</p>	<p>The V&amp;A was very comfortable to visit as a sighted person. I find I'm more relaxed at the V&amp;A than places like Tate Modern or Hayward Gallery. Vast open spaces are uncomfortable for me, and V&amp;A is designed in a way that feels more intimate and more pleasant.</p>
<p>Tactile books were in select spaces, and are often taken by sighted people as a souvenir or collectable.</p>	<p>Handling of objects wasn't offered during the visit or offered as a service over the phone. Information in an accessible format was not offered at any point during the visit.</p>	<p>Inadequate labeling: Some art pieces are not labeled clearly with large print or braille, making it challenging for visually impaired visitors to understand the exhibit fully.</p>	<p>I was relieved that the lighting was soft and ambient as harsh lighting triggers my migraine headaches, but this may not be the best lighting for someone with visual impairments.</p>
<p>The space is packed with people and is not easy to navigate for people with disabilities.</p>	<p>The sighted guide often walked past many of the exhibits in one of the spaces without giving context as to why. It felt rushed. In two other, smaller, exhibitions sighted guide described most/all exhibits.</p>	<p>Poor lighting: Insufficient lighting or glare can make it challenging for visually impaired visitors to perceive the artwork, resulting in an unpleasant or unfulfilling experience.</p>	<p>I noted accessible entrances, accessible toilets, and a lift. I took note of the captions— they were all in English. I didn't notice any braille. I wondered if the V&amp;A offer audio descriptions in other languages, but have yet to look into it.</p>

## **Victoria & Albert** - Museum and gallery

### Shaden's Experience

Touch tours needed to be booked in advance and are not available for all rooms.

Tactile books were in select spaces, and are often taken by sighted people as a souvenir or collectable.

The space is packed with people and is not easy to navigate for people with disabilities.



## **Victoria & Albert** - Museum and gallery

### Alhaan's Experience

Lack of tactile exhibits: Many exhibits are visual only and do not provide tactile experiences for the visually impaired visitors to explore the art.

Inadequate labeling: Some art pieces are not labeled clearly with large print or braille, making it challenging for visually impaired visitors to understand the exhibit fully.

Poor lighting: Insufficient lighting or glare can make it challenging for visually impaired visitors to perceive the artwork, resulting in an unpleasant or unfulfilling experience.

## **Victoria & Albert** - Museum and gallery

### Kimberley's Experience

- Missed out on the exhibition she initially wanted to visit as a sighted guide could not be sourced
- No opportunity to document images as there wasn't any rapport with the sighted guide
- Walked past many of the exhibits in Re:Imagining Musicals with no context making for a limiting experience
- Supported visit to the Painting gallery was a welcome addition
- Basic descriptive language limited the experience and no invitation to accessible materials amplified this

## **Reflection:**

“My visit to the Victoria and Albert Museum was pleasant enough. However, for a museum priding itself on being inclusive, I felt underwhelmed. The website assures you can speak to a member of staff upon arrival, but if you're blind you must book ahead and, in my case, miss the exhibition you wanted to engage with!

I felt the sighted guide's descriptive language was limiting at times to just a few words, especially during the Re:imagining Musicals exhibition. This could have been for a myriad of reasons, perhaps there was an overwhelming number of items in the exhibition or he wasn't as interested in describing the costumes. I could tell we walked past a lot of objects and costumes. I would have appreciated clear context and insight rather than being questioned on which musicals I knew.” Kimberley

## Victoria & Albert - Museum and gallery

### Elijah's Experience

The V&A was very comfortable to visit as a sighted person. I find I'm more relaxed at the V&A than places like Tate Modern or Hayward Gallery. Vast open spaces are uncomfortable for me, and V&A is designed in a way that feels more intimate and more pleasant.



I was relieved that the lighting was soft and ambient as harsh lighting triggers my migraine headaches, but this may not be the best lighting for someone with visual impairments.



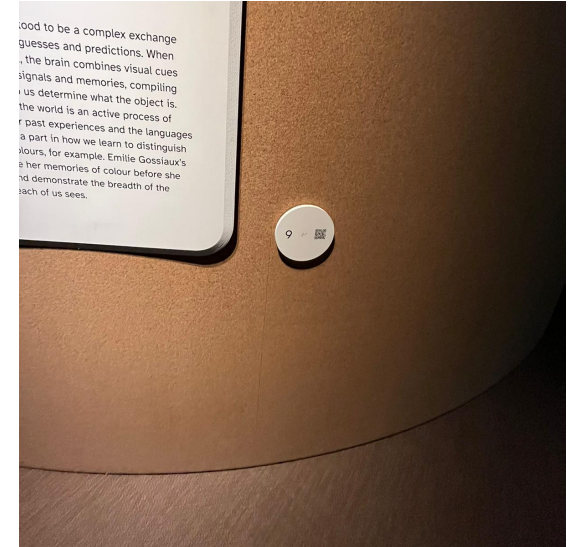
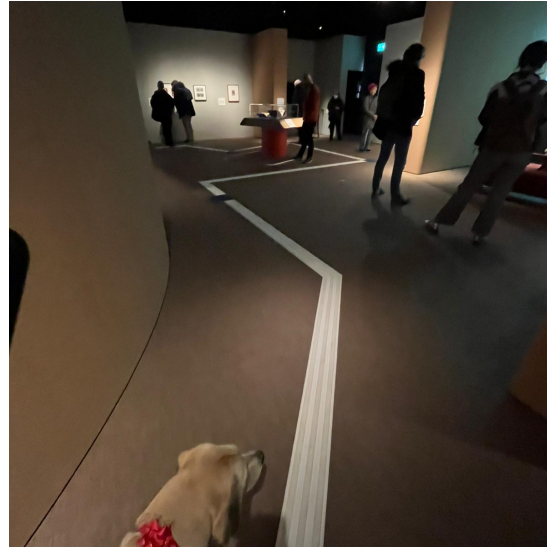
I noted accessible entrances, accessible toilets, and a lift. I took note of the captions— they were all in English. I didn't notice any braille. I wondered if the V&A offer audio descriptions in other languages, but have yet to look into it.





## In Plain Sight - Galleries

### Kimberley's Experience



In Plain Sight is an exhibition which explores the different ways that we see and are seen by others. It is divided into four themes – symbolism of the eye, bias of visual perception, eyewear and identity, and interconnection of the senses. Exhibits, exploring the historic to the contemporary, the scientific and the medical, to the religious and the artistic, all celebrate and unpick the importance of our eyes.

## **In Plain Sight Accessibility:**

- Bookable sessions alter the lighting conditions across the gallery and audio described tours are available
- There is an accessible entrance to the building
- Assistance dogs are welcome
- Lifts available
- Information is available in a multitude of formats: regular print and a visual story guide for sighted visitors, large print and Braille for visually impaired and blind visitors, and a digital guide for all visitors which includes audio description
- Sighted guides and staff were on hand throughout the exhibition space

## **Improvements:**

“There are certainly improvements that could be made. This included the low-level lighting in the space (brighter lighting situations were available at certain times of the day during specific tours), as well as the hand symbols and QR codes being communicated in a more obvious, tactile manner for those with visual impairments. As sight loss tends to affect people as they age, a large part of the visually impaired community may not own a smartphone to access QR codes. The audio levels could have been louder for the Notes on Blindness recording itself. The original was a series of old cassette tape recordings. The new mixing made it so the modern sound effects/soundscapes sometimes drowned the author’s voice.” Kimberley

## **In Plain Sight Reflection:**

“This is one of the most inclusive and immersive exhibitions I’ve been to in terms of engaging exhibits, subject matter, accessibility options, dialogue and the user experience. I was guided properly, safely and appropriately and was always invited to provide feedback on what was working for me. I never felt rushed and was treated with respect and dignity. I expressed my struggle to hear on the day due to an ongoing ear infection in my left ear. I was accommodated appropriately just as anyone else who may be hard of hearing.

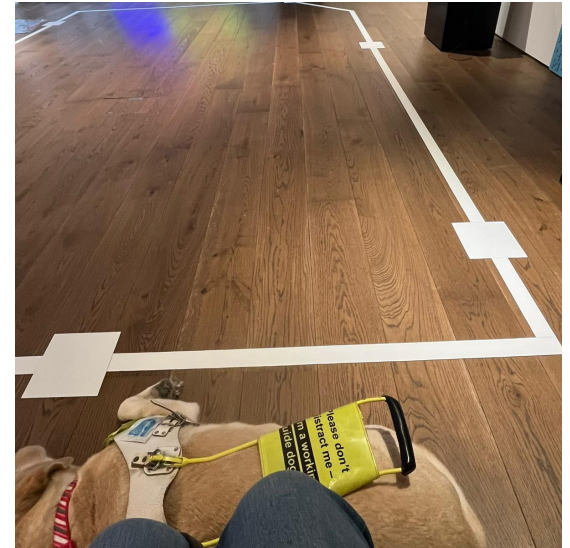
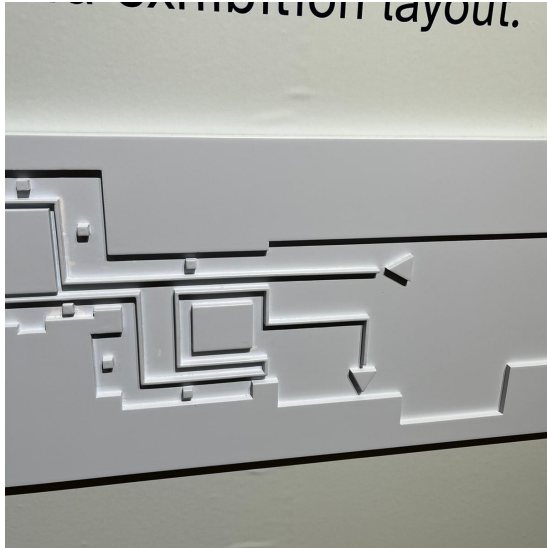
The exhibition was rich in content and each of the sections were explained thoroughly from the beginning. I was invited and encouraged to take photos for my documentation purposes. This felt like a huge contrast to the V&A where I felt rushed through the exhibition spaces and like I couldn’t ask my sighted guide to document anything as we hadn’t established rapport.

The final exhibit had a profound effect on me and I’m glad it was included in its own dedicated space. A number of the works I have since reflected on, often, included the sculptures and drawings of the artist who morphed herself and her Guide Dog into one being demonstrating the power of a working partnership, and the blind artist who reflected on colour with language and created her own catalogue. Revisiting Notes on Blindness now that I have lost my own sight, in maturity and now understanding the fragility of life, was both powerful and moving.”



## Layers of Vision - Galleries

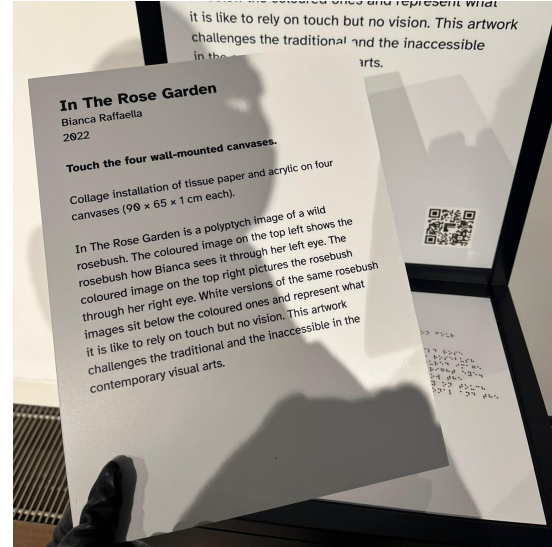
### Kimberley's Experience



Layers of Vision is an exhibition exploring individual experiences of what it's like to be blind or visually impaired living in a sighted world. It aims to celebrate sight loss and accessibility in joyous, multi-sensory ways. The launch of Layers of Vision coincided with Disability History Month 2022 and was devised by Dr. Katharina Husemann, Dr. Anica Zeyen, and Dr. Leighanne Higgins.

## Layers of Vision - Galleries

### Kimberley's Experience



**“Feel, follow, and find your way through layers of vision.”**

## **Layers of Vision Accessibility:**

- 3D Printed wayfinding map on the wall
- Wayfinding path on the floor
- Information in the exhibition space was available in Braille, large print and audio formats with a headset attached to a station next to each installation
- Audio description was narrated by each exhibiting artist
- Large print font was a 16 point blue on white rounded font approved by the RNIB
- There was a ramp to the building
- Assistance dogs were welcome
- Accessible toilets were situated close by
- Medium-level lighting and no background music
- Sighted guides available
- Encouraged to touch and participate with all exhibits

## Layers of Vision Reflection

“After a negative start, Layers of Vision was an afternoon well spent with Dr. Katharina Husemann. This was an exhibition with great attention to accessibility; through clear large print labels (16 point in a rounded font approved by the RNIB), Braille cards, and audio - all housed in a convenient structure with sturdy materials. The three-dimensional map on the wall was slightly helpful but a sighted guide is much more appreciated in my circumstances. No sighted guides were on-hand when I first arrived at the exhibition but there were a number to assist later in the day. It would have been useful if the receptionists knew which exhibition I was referring to, and if sighted guides were already present at my time of arrival upstairs, to make the visit more streamlined.

There could be improvements made to the wayfinding signage on the floor as I couldn't feel it under my shoes when comparing surface qualities to the tape and to the wood panelling of the floor, though I understand it cannot pose too much of an obstacle where it will create a health and safety risk. Dr. Katharina Husemann agreed the wayfinding could also be improved. As I didn't have my cane, I am curious about its efficiency.

My favourite installation was Aaron McPeake's Subjective Acuity, turning the famous Snellen chart (eye chart) into an aluminium wind chime. The concept was thought provoking and the meditative sound created an immersive atmosphere for all to enjoy beyond sight.” Kimberley



## Meeting with Dr. Katharina Husemann

- Kimberley met with Dr Katharina Husemann, who realised the Layers of Vision exhibition, to reflect on the accessibility, what worked and what didn't work as effectively, her favourite exhibits, reason for visiting, how she found out about the exhibition, and why she believes the accessible exhibition, and others like it, is important.
- She imparted her current research paper with Kimberley which cannot be shared among her cohort or with the RCA as it is not yet published. The paper outlines marketplace accessibility from a service-provider viewpoint and identifies key challenges from structured interviews and eight museums with access programmes for customers with visual impairment. There are three types of access - autonomous access, embodied access and social access.
  - **Autonomous access refers to facilitating an independence experience.**
  - **Embodied access refers to creating a sense of safety in a space.**
  - **Social access creates a sense of belonging in a space.**
- There are limitations and challenges within each area of access as well as limitations to this area of study as being only one part of the disabled experience.
- Dr. Katharina Husemann has been a vital contact in the AcrossRCA work and will remain in Kimberley's network.



## **Survey** Distribution

To get a better understanding of individual needs, we sent out a survey to communities that serve the blind and visually impaired asking about their personal experiences in museums and galleries.

### **Charities**

**R N I B**



**See differently**

### **Community Groups**



### **Researchers**



Royal College of Art

**THE HELEN  
HAMLYN CENTRE  
FOR DESIGN**

The survey was distributed in a multitude of places from Kimberley's network in the sight loss charity/voluntary sector.

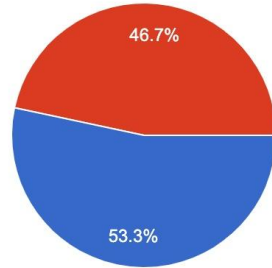
The survey was shared with:

- Kimberley's personal network of visually impaired / blind friends and acquaintances. This included VI artists, campaigners and volunteers in prominent sight loss charities.
- Twitter using hashtag #BlindTwitter
- RNIB and their Accessibility Team
- Posting to the RNIB Connect Facebook groups (Manchester, Yorkshire, and London)
- Emailing Mind's Eye / Anne Hornsby - an audio describer in art galleries and museums across the North West. Anne shared the survey with her mailing list.
- Henshaws Society for Blind People in Manchester. Henshaws distributed this with their Museums and Galleries group
- Contacting Henshaws' Museums and Galleries group founder Mary Gifford
- MaMoMi Initiative and founder Andrew Mashigo who shared the survey on his mailing list and on instagram
- Guide Dogs for the Blind Association

## Do you visit art galleries and museums frequently?

 Copy

15 responses

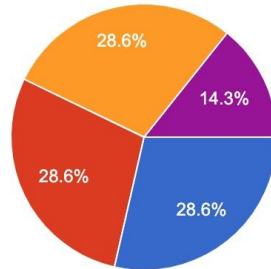


- Yes
- No

## If you have answered no, why is this?

 Copy

7 responses



- I have no one to go with to support me.
- I don't know how to request support at the gallery or museum for my visit
- I find the spaces intimidating or inaccessible.
- I don't have an interest in visiting art galleries or museums.
- I struggle to see clearly so don't really get full benefit



## How many times a year do you visit art galleries or museums?

15 responses

0

twice or thrice

Probably twice a month over 11 months

1-2

2 in 5 years

26

6 or 7

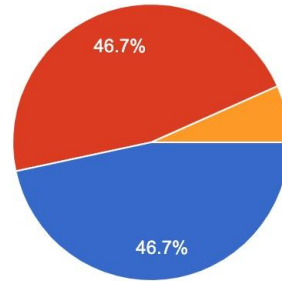
12+




6

### Do you feel comfortable being in a museum and art gallery space?

 Copy

15 responses

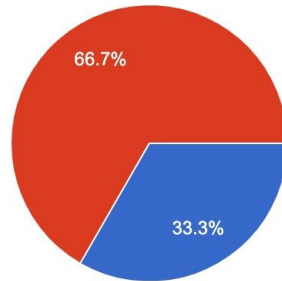





-  Yes
-  Somewhat (when being supported by others)
-  No

### Do you visit art galleries and museums independently or visit with other people?

 Copy

15 responses



-  I visit galleries independently
-  I visit with friends, family or acquaintances
-  I book sighted assistance with the venue

## If you don't feel comfortable in an art gallery or museum space, why is this?

8 responses

Orientation and lack of surroundings

Getting too close to exhibits makes them act weird, some videos are on small televisions and can't see them

Some areas are dark and therefore not accessible. Some art work is on the floor and has no accessible floor mats/signs/markings so I could easily walk through causing upset and embarrassment and destroying pieces.

Can't see where to go or where the art is

Wokeness, cultural Marxism, toxic feminism, misandry, anti-indigenous racism, heterophobia and leftist groupthink.

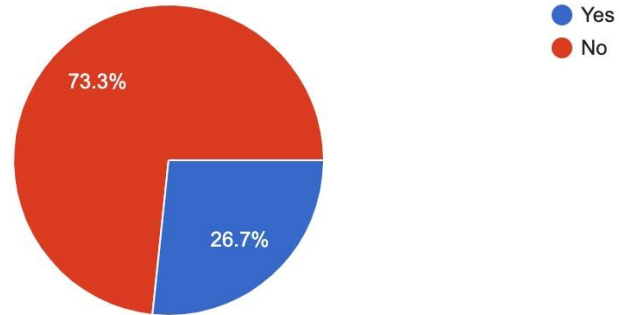
Only if visiting by myself.

Not able to see hazard and obstacles afraid of doing some damage

Our local museums and art galleries use very dim lighting that causes me to worry more about bumping into people and parts of the exhibits. I'm afraid that I'll hurt myself or others or even damage the equipment.

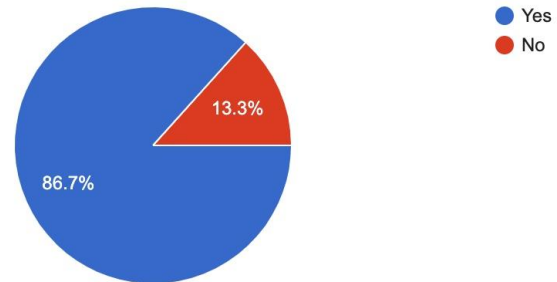
### Do you find sighted assistance, touch tours and guided tours easy to book?

15 responses



### Would you prefer a standard framework of accessibility at each venue so you know what to expect?

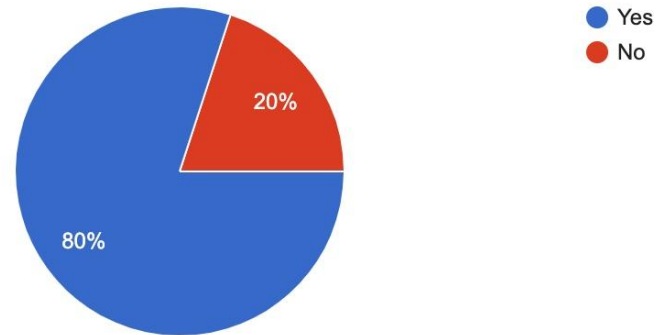
15 responses





Do you struggle to access information in an accessible format (Braille, large print, audio description, QR code linking to website) when visiting art galleries and museums?

15 responses





## Can you describe a positive overall experience in an art gallery or museum that you've had?

15 responses

MoMA - was given a tactile one on one tour of the cloisters and invited to a chamber concert

Understanding staff at Glasgow Art School summer exhibition in 1018 before it burned down

Well lit, a varied collection of art, large print description at the side which I can scan and listen to using my Seeing AI app. Ground floor exhibitions. Large open space and staff willing to help who also have a passion for art.

A member of staff joined us as we walk round and was very interactive and described and went through exhibitions

Visiting Uffizi and Louvre with son and wife

The Wellcome Collections recent exhibition, In Plain Sight, was very well put together. Considerations for blind visitors, the use of cork material on the wall to dull the external sounds, the Lights Up sessions where the gallery is lit brighter for those who might need more light in the space, and more importantly, the use of multiple handling objects, and the availability of interpretation materials like Braille, Audio description, large print, and the Easy reader app, all makes access a lot easier, and the exhibition a lot more inclusive

Can you describe a negative overall experience in an art gallery or museum that you've had? What barriers did you face to make it a negative experience?

15 responses

Feeling uncomfortable, not being able to read the little note next to the artwork so can't appreciate it like the sighted

Very poor lighting ( supposedly to create ambience) cramped exhibitions. Are pieces which are in glass boxes, cupboards, framed have lights reflecting which cause glare and impact enjoyment. Exhibitions which are on many floors with no lifts. Exhibitions which have pieces on the floor with no markings to warn you. Unfriendly and unhelpful staff ( like old school librarians). Disabled toilets in general toilets with poor lighting.

There were lots of obstacles, no touch tour available, how much is left to her own devices

Not knowing what I was looking at, where to stand, what the exhibit was about.

When multiple audio installations are placed in close proximity to each other at exhibitions, it creates a lot of sound bleed and incoherent audio experience

Most force their political worldview, Wokeness, misandry, anti -indigenous, heterophobic and toxic feminism on you.

Timestamp	Do you visit art galleries and museums frequently?	If you have answered no, why is this?
30/01/2023 10:12:55	No	I have no one to go with to support me.
31/01/2023 03:38:45	Yes	
01/02/2023 14:27:34	Yes	
02/02/2023 08:19:20	No	I don't know how to request support at the gallery or museum for my visit
02/02/2023 12:36:25	No	I find the spaces intimidating or inaccessible.
02/02/2023 21:44:54	Yes	
03/02/2023 10:03:39	Yes	
03/02/2023 11:00:01	Yes	
03/02/2023 11:25:55	Yes	
04/02/2023 13:16:47	Yes	
07/02/2023 13:22:38	No	I struggle to see clearly so don't really get full benefit
07/02/2023 14:28:15	Yes	
07/02/2023 15:53:58	No	I don't know how to request support at the gallery or museum for my visit
07/02/2023 19:43:25	No	I find the spaces intimidating or inaccessible.
16/02/2023 02:47:41	No	I have no one to go with to support me.

How many times a year do you visit art galleries or museums?	Do you plan your visit ahead of time?
	0 Yes
twice or thrice	Yes
Probably twice a month over 11 months	No, I like to be spontaneous
1-2	No, I like to be spontaneous
2 in 5 years	Yes
	26 Yes
6 or 7	Yes
	12 Yes
	6 Yes
	20 Yes
	3 Yes
	12 Yes
One	Yes
Twice	Yes
Once or less than once a year.	Yes

<b>Do you visit art galleries and museums independently or visit with other people?</b>	<b>Do you book guided tours and touch tours?</b>
I visit with friends, family or acquaintances	No
I visit with friends, family or acquaintances	No
I visit with friends, family or acquaintances	No
I visit with friends, family or acquaintances	No
I visit with friends, family or acquaintances	Yes
I visit galleries independently	Yes
I visit galleries independently	Yes
I visit galleries independently	No
I visit galleries independently	Yes
I visit with friends, family or acquaintances	Yes
I visit with friends, family or acquaintances	No
I visit galleries independently	No
I visit with friends, family or acquaintances	Yes
I visit with friends, family or acquaintances	Yes
I visit with friends, family or acquaintances	No



<b>Do you find touch tours and guided tours useful and accessible?</b>	<b>Do you find sighted assistance, touch tours and guided tours easy to book?</b>
No	No
No	No
Yes	No
Yes	No
Yes	No
Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes
No	No
Yes	Yes
Yes	No
Yes	Yes
Yes	No
Yes	No
Yes	No
Yes	No

**Do you feel that any improvements could be made to these services from your experiences?**

None

Unsure as my assistance helps me but I should look more into the facilities, didn't know they were readily available they do not make it too clear

Definitely. I didn't know there was sighted guides available. This would definitely help me appreciate the art more than ge rushed through by reluctant family members.

Yes

Yes

Yes

The problem is Wokeness, cultural Marxism, toxic feminism, anti-indigenous racism, heterophobia and leftist groupthink, in museums and galleries.

I don't use them

Regular and up-to-date communication about upcoming events. Would be great to have a resource that shares all possible accessible events as some are missed and not known about.

Yes

No

I have been unable to find any touch tours at museums or art galleriesp

Yes

Yes lots of publicity as to what is happening and available

Upfront and easily accessible information or directions on how to book would be really helpful. Instead of having to hunt for this information online or in-person, it'd be great if it were offered to patrons like any other service.

**If you visit art galleries and museums regularly, and book sighted assistance, touch tours and sighted tours, do you find there is a difference in the support you receive across the venues?**

No

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

No

No

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

No

Would you prefer a standard framework of accessibility at each venue so you know what to expect?	Do you feel comfortable being in a museum and art gallery space?
Yes	Somewhat (when being supported by others)
Yes	Somewhat (when being supported by others)
Yes	Somewhat (when being supported by others)
Yes	Yes
Yes	No
Yes	Yes
Yes	Somewhat (when being supported by others)
No	Yes
Yes	Somewhat (when being supported by others)
No	Yes
Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes
Yes	Somewhat (when being supported by others)
Yes	Somewhat (when being supported by others)

**If you don't feel comfortable in an art gallery or museum space, why is this?**

Orientation and lack of surroundings

Getting too close to exhibits makes them act weird, some videos are on small televisions and can't see them

Some areas are dark and therefore not accessible. Some art work is on the floor and has no accessible floor mats/signs/markings so I could easily walk through causing upset and embarrassment and destroying pieces.

Can't see where to go or where the art is

Wokeness, cultural Marxism, toxic feminism, misogyny, anti-indigenous racism, heterophobia and leftist groupthink.

Only if visiting by myself.

Not able to see hazard and obstacles afraid of doing some damage

Our local museums and art galleries use very dim lighting that causes me to worry more about bumping into people and parts of the exhibits. I'm afraid that I'll hurt myself or others or even damage the equipment.



**Do you feel art gallery and museums could do more to make their exhibitions and spaces accessible?**

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

**Do you struggle to access information in an accessible format (Braille, large print, audio description, QR code linking to website) when visiting art galleries and museums?**

Yes

Yes

No

Yes

Yes

No

No

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

**Do you find the space difficult to orientate yourself in and navigate around?**

Yes

No

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

No

No

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

**What could help make your experience more accessible overall?**

Unsure

More understanding from all, the gallery and other visitors, just because I do not use a blind cane doesn't mean I can see the same as them

On the website staying accessible guides are available.

Better visual awareness training, a standard platform throughout all galleries, in museums more interactive shows

Audio guides,

A lot more consideration to how exhibits and the collection in museums are displayed and laid out. A little more proactive involvement of the specific user groups when designing and planning exhibitions

Stop the nauseating wokeness

Nearly every time I have to ask for a large print guide instead of it just being available and visible, and when I do they only have one about 50% of the time, usually after some poor invigilator has gone looking for it for 10 minutes

Better signage, QR codes to access information is about exhibits. Knowing about events.

A strategy around accessibility embedded across the entire venue, programming and marketing

I go with husband so it's okay

If assistance was standardised

More sighted assistance plus also an app I could download onto my phone with navigation as well as our way audio description

Signage large print description

Being open and welcoming to accessible forms of interaction between patrons and the art pieces/exhibits would be amazing - if staff offered these services just like any other. Bright or brighter lighting would be spectacular, if

**Can you describe a positive overall experience in an art gallery or museum that you've had?**

MoMA - was given a tactile one on one tour of the cloisters and invited to a chamber concert

Understanding staff at Glasgow Art School summer exhibition in 1018 before it burned down

Well lit, a varied collection of art, large print description at the side which I can scan and listen to using my Seeing AI app. Ground floor exhibitions. Large open space and staff willing to help who also have a passion for art.

A member of staff joined us as we walk round and was very interactive and described and went through exhibitions

Visiting Uffizi and Louvre with son and wife

The Wellcome Collections recent exhibition, In Plain Sight, was very well put together. Considerations for blind visitors, the use of cork material on the wall to dull the external sounds, the Lights Up sessions where the gallery

I had one guide that didn't force their political/feminist/Woke views on me, she was very fair and balanced.

I went to the new-ish Wellcome/medical science galleries at the Science Museum recently and it actually made me realise how bad a lot of others are. Spacious, sensibly laid out, evenly lit with natural light where possible and

Most special audio described events have been excellent. Just finding a way to venue and meeting point sometimes difficult.

Yes in Rio Brazil a blind educator took me around a Picasso exhibition it was the most interesting and accessible exhibition I've ever been to.

Hawes museum spacious and light

At the British Music Experience the staff greet you on arrival & guide you & describe the exhibits & provide headsets for audio-described exhibits & hands on musical instruments

Manchester at Gallery organise an audio described to work with and Hornsby I thoroughly enjoyed that

No

My visits to museums and art galleries were mostly prior to my significant sight loss.

**Can you describe a negative overall experience in an art gallery or museum that you've had? What barriers did you face to make it a negative experience?**

None

Feeling uncomfortable, not being able to read the little note next to the artwork so can't appreciate it like the sighted

Very poor lighting ( supposedly to create ambience) crammed exhibitions. Are pieces which are in glass boxes, cupboards, framed have lights reflecting which cause glare and impact enjoyment. Exhibitions which are on many

There were lots of obstacles, no touch tour available, how much is left to her own devices

Not knowing what I was looking at, where to stand, what the exhibit was about.

When multiple audio installations are placed in close proximity to each other at exhibitions, it creates a lot of sound bleed and incoherent audio experience

Most force their political worldview, Wokeness, misandry, anti -indigenous, heterophobic and toxic feminism on you.

A couple of years ago now (2019?) but the worst by far was an artist who identified as disabled themselves, though not blind or VI, crowing about being accessible and how people need to think about disabled people's needs

If not, a pre-planned audio described event, difficulty in wayfinding.

No one was interested in making the experience possible, dismissive when I asked for audio descriptions or other information, they didn't even explain where the galleries, toilets or cafes were so I left.

No

In the Walker Art Gallery you have to use a QR code near the entrance which you can't find without a sighted person. Then when you get to some artwork not all a sighted person has to show you where the QR code is!!

Afraid of walking into exhibits

As above

Having to get closer to things in order to properly see them makes me feel guilty. We're not supposed to get close to things for a reason (theft, damage etc) so I feel like I'm doing something wrong when I'm just trying to understand!



## **Quotes / Testimonials**

“I have filled in the survey. Good luck with it all. I think it is great that this work is being done. I was an art student right through to University, and was visually impaired, and the art galleries and museums at that time had absolutely nothing and no awareness which was very isolating and made my studies very difficult. So if this work helps bring change, an awareness, and makes studying easier, and enjoying a colour is better, then I’m all for it. Good luck again, take care.”

### **Survey Participant**

## Quotes / Testimonials

“This is vital work.”

## Survey Participant

Kimberley, with her Guide Dog, Tami, at the Royal Academy of Arts.



We feel the best solution is to create a **Charter** based on the evidence from the Accessibility Survey.

### **What is a Charter and what does it do?**

Charter; a document granting certain specified rights, powers, privileges, or functions from the sovereign power of a state to an individual, corporation, city, or other unit of local organisation.

Source: <https://www.britannica.com>

## Charter for Art Galleries and Museums

- Art gallery and museum staff **must have sighted guide training** so that they can appropriately accommodate blind and visually impaired visitors around the space safely.
- Art gallery and museum space **must have appropriate levels of lighting** for visitors with low vision and other disabilities.
- Art gallery and museum space **must have suitable signage inside all areas of the venue and in multiple formats** including large print, Braille, and digital/QR codes for visitors with a screen reader on their smartphone.
- Art gallery and museum space **must have an accessible and safe wayfinding system on the floor for each exhibition space** to accommodate blind and visually impaired visitors using a cane.
- Art gallery and museum **must ensure touch tours, guided tours and sighted guides are easy to book over the phone and/or online**. Staff must be trained to accommodate blind and visually impaired visitors using inclusive, descriptive language.

## **Interview with a Visually Impaired Museum Volunteer**

who shares their experience of what it was like to work with a prestigious museum for a number of years and the issues they faced.

\* All traces of identity removed at the interviewee's request.

### **How did you become a volunteer for a museum space?**

I started with work experience as a student and didn't leave, at least not initially.

### **What attracted you to volunteering in a museum?**

The stories of the objects in the collection.

### **How long were you a volunteer at a museum space?**

Nine and a half years. Although I'm still involved in the sector, just not at the museum in question anymore.

**Can you tell me a little bit about what your volunteer role entailed?**

Cataloguing new objects into the collection, supervising public object handling sessions and providing short introductory guided tours of exhibitions.

**Did you feel fully supported by the museum you volunteered at to carry out your role?**

Initially yes, but not for the final 4 years I was there.

**Did you support blind or visually impaired people in your volunteer role?**

Unfortunately not. We only had one blind visitor at the museum on a day I was in, in the whole time I was there. I was the only one aside from that.

**How accessible did you find the gallery space as a visually impaired person? (Were labels and signage available in an accessible format, for example? Was the space free of obstacles and easy to move around in?)**

It varied by site. The main museum was very accessible, but the stores had obstacles which is a given for that particular environment as things get moved around in the stores much more often than they do in a museum. It was something I was both expecting and prepared for.



**What aspects could have been improved to support you as a visually impaired person, or to support others with visual impairments in the museum space?**

Can't think of anything specifically linked to my visual impairment, as I have multiple disabilities. The signage probably.

**What was successful in your time of volunteering in the museum space as a visually impaired person?**

Opening doors to multiple contacts in the industry from other museums and galleries.

**Are there any other things you'd like to share about your time volunteering in regards to access?**

I knew problems were starting to creep in when I was overlooked for a paid role on three occasions. On one of the occasions, I was holding a conversation with one of the successful candidates, who admitted they didn't know how they had even got an interview, never mind the role, as they didn't meet the minimum person specification.

My Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) was never renewed, despite there being a legal requirement for it to be reviewed and renewed annually. I walked in on a row one day when one of the curators was yelling at the volunteers co-ordinator "(my surname) is a f\*\*\*ng liability to this place and needs to be moved". I was the only person with that surname at the museum at that time. I was taken to one side and asked to lie to assessors, which I flatly refused to do.

The museum briefed against a volunteer as having committed a crime they hadn't (the volunteer had stood trial but found not to be guilty) and hauled all volunteers in wanting to know why we hadn't informed them of this volunteer having committed the crime and the museum or gallery refused to admit the organisation was in the wrong. All of this was shocking to say the least and has impacted my views on the sector and my confidence as a disabled, and visually impaired, volunteer.

“Thank you for reaching out and wishing you huge success in the future. Unfortunately, what you’re suggesting will never come to pass as there is too much money involved in major galleries and museums for them to consider visually impaired people for access. They don’t care about us as creatives in the sector and, when they do, it’s a tick-box exercise to make them feel good or because visually impaired art is a FAD. These are the home truths when it comes to visually impaired people accessing art. Even organisations such as the RA [Royal Academy] say things that will fit in with what society needs to hear at the time. But in fairness, it’s a token and no strategy will be put into place. Elitism in the art sector is toxic. All you can do is continually put yourself out there and hopefully [in] 20 years plus [time] things might change for the next visually impaired creatives [where] we’re not seen as a hobby.

...I’ve just had a bad [run-in] with a huge organisation who feel uncomfortable with portraying visual impairment in a piece of public art even though the design was approved. This is the world we live in.”

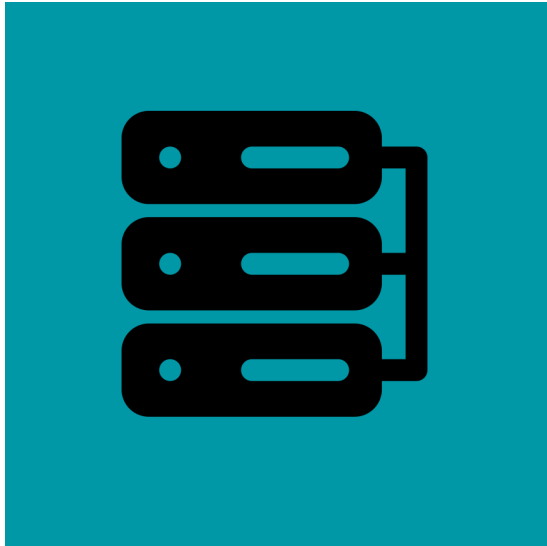
## **Visually Impaired Artist**

\*Identity kept anonymous at request

## Feedback Database

### Active Database

Accessed by stakeholders



### Data Analysis

Insights and archiving information

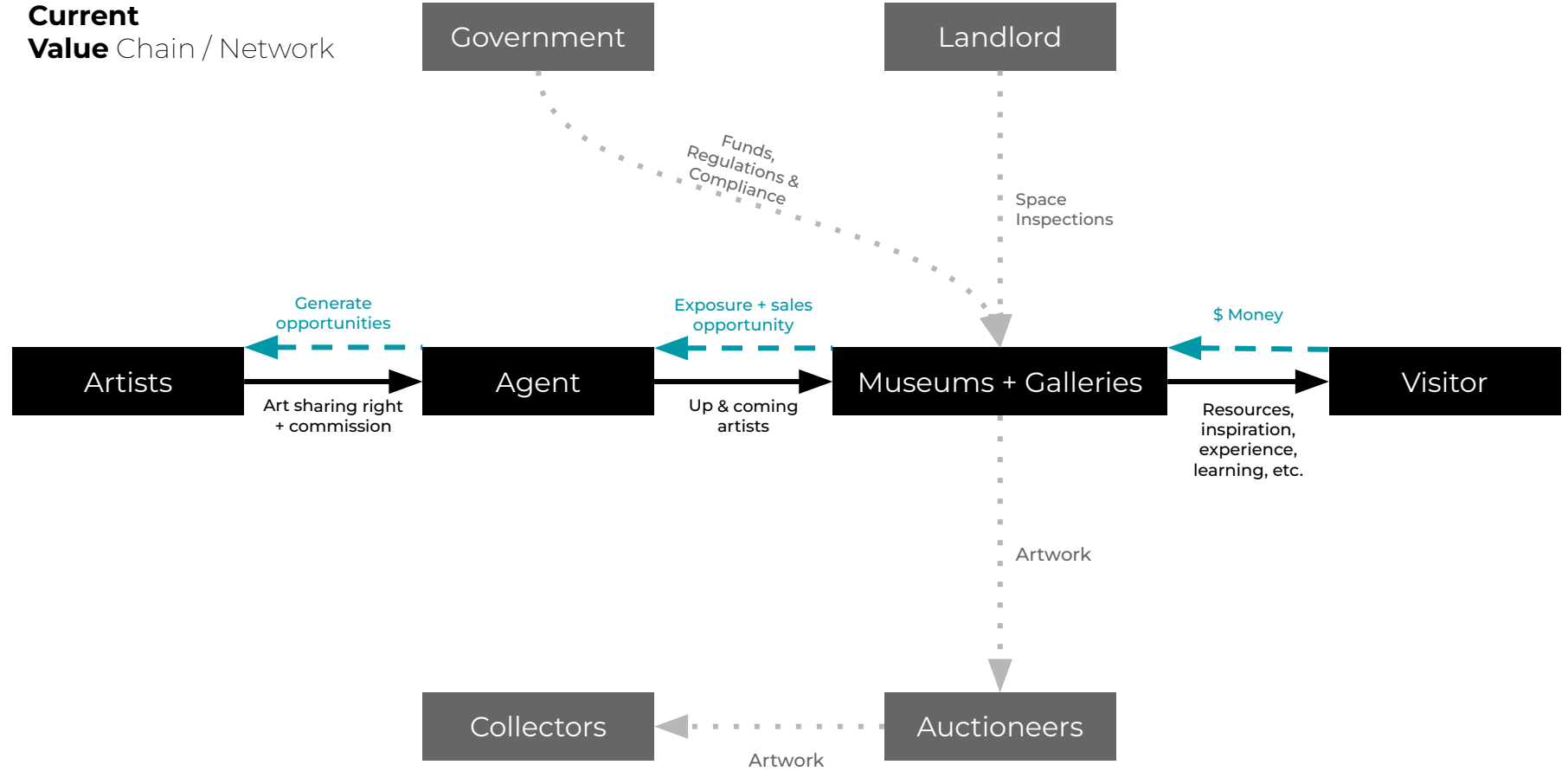


### Summary Reports

Accessible to wider community



**Current Value Chain / Network**

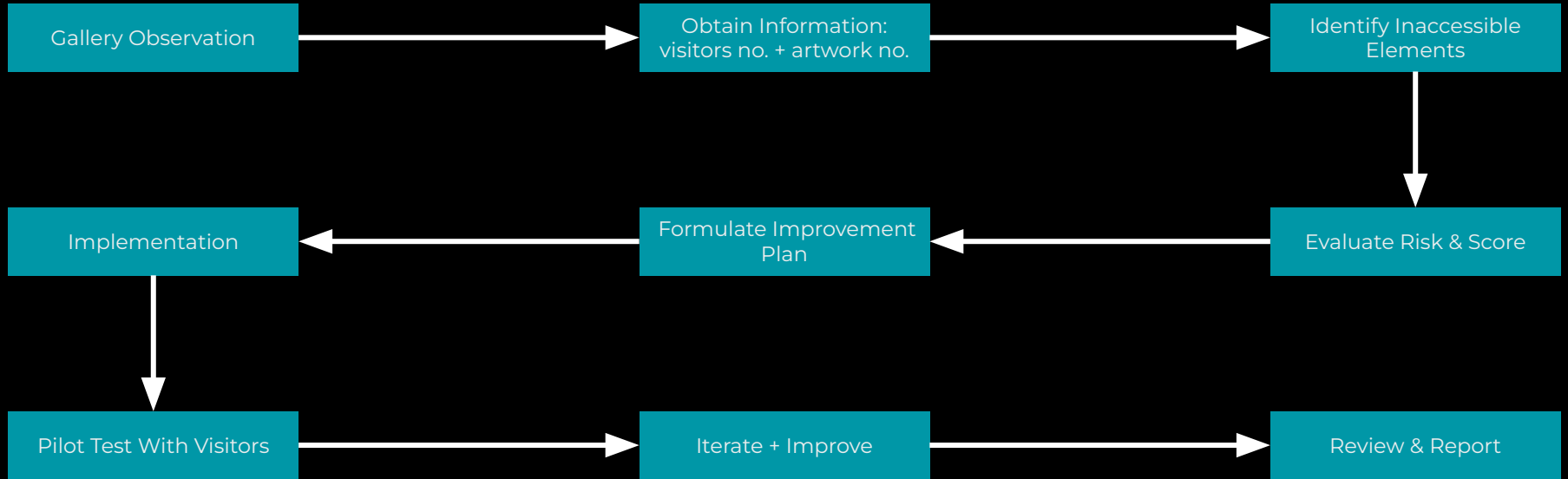


**How** does our solution work?

**Where** does it fit in?



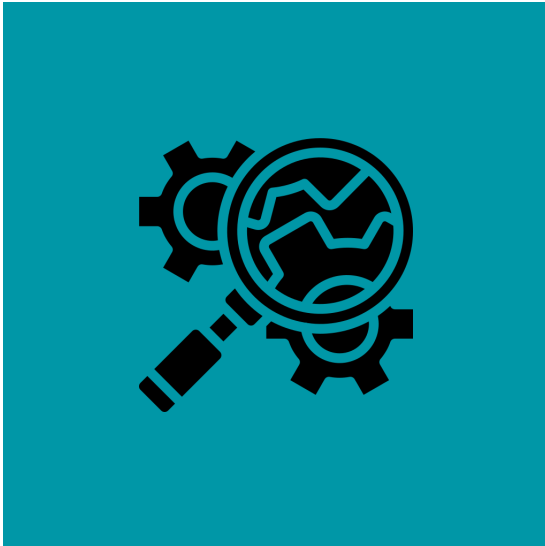
# Inclusivity & Accessibility Consultancy - **System Map**



## Services Offered to Galleries

### Problem **Diagnostics**

Space Analysis



### Solution

### **Recommendations**

Improvement & Implementation



### Pilot **Testing**

With Focus Group



How is solution **funded**?



partially

## **Government Funded**

To promote inclusivity and accessibility in all social and knowledge oriented spaces



charge

## **Service Fee**

For consultancy services, implementation and testing.