

AGA Equity Committee Public Update #3

This report summarises the activities of the AGA Equity Committee since May 2022.

Since our last update, the Equity Committee has worked on several initiatives in the areas of accessibility, community engagement and staff training.

Accessibility

In August 2022, the AGA hired a consultant to undertake an accessibility audit of its physical spaces to support our goal of increased accessibility. The consultant's report provided valuable insights into potential barriers to access and areas for improvement, offering both short-term and long-term recommendations. Framed in this way, we identified focus areas and sought funding opportunities to support the implementation of select recommendations.

Our first initiative focused on increasing support for visitors with visual impairments and blindness when visiting the AGA. Our initial step was a community consultation with our partner the CNIB to gather resources. As an immediate action, we increased the font size of all exhibition labels and now offer large script text in booklet form. Additional research led us to contract VocalEyes from the UK to facilitate Audio Description Training for our front-line staff with the goal of audio describing works of art from our collection. We are currently in the final stages of recording and adding the audio descriptions to the AGA website.

In 2024, we continued to build audience accessibility through the introduction of whisper mics as a regular feature of our tour program. The whisper mic allows visitors to listen to the tour guide without straining to hear and blocks out some of the ambient noise in the exhibition spaces.

Community Engagement

In 2023, we hosted a community consultation and invited interested seniors to meet with us to better understand the barriers they face in accessing the AGA. We learned that social isolation, safety, transportation and parking challenges, admission fees, and lack of programming options or program timing (evening, after dark, or weekends) all impact seniors' ability to visit the AGA.

Following the consultation, seniors from the community consultation and discussion went on to form Aging Artfully, our volunteer Seniors' Advisory Committee. The committee meets monthly to advise the Education and Learning team on programming initiatives and strategies for removing barriers. Members also play active roles in delivering our programming. This collaboration resulted in the successful launch of two monthly programs for seniors, including film screenings and exhibition tours. In October 2023, we hosted our inaugural Senior's Takeover Day, which featured a full programming day for seniors organized by seniors. The work of our committee was recognized by the Canadian Museums Association with a Volunteer (Group) Award earlier this year. This continued in 2024.

In 2023 and 2024, we also partnered with CARFAC Alberta to develop a series of professional development and networking events for artists in our community. The latest event was specifically designed for artists from marginalized communities. We leveraged our contacts at CARFAC,

Edmonton Arts Council, Alberta Foundation for the Arts and others to ensure that artists had an opportunity to network with people at these organizations and assembled a team of ambassadors to facilitate conversations.

Staff Training

In addition to the audio description training, we tested a series of DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) learning strategies during monthly AGA staff meetings. Each session is about 5 minutes long and includes a different topic. Examples include learning the Cree name and correct pronunciation for Edmonton, engaging in a trauma-informed empathy exercise (“T-shirt” activity), and supporting racialized graphic designers through font selection choice.

Additionally, we have developed a prototype onboarding module for new staff. This module offers a broad introduction to equity themes and concepts, ensuring that all new hires have a foundational understanding of these topics. The module includes a glossary of terms, an inclusive language guide, and articles on identifying racism, facilitating difficult conversations and understanding bias and privilege.

If you have any questions or would like to share your own experiences and/or ideas, please contact info@youraga.ca.