



2026

STEPS Public Art

Accessible Art and Placemaking Toolkit




Presented to the National Assembly of State
Arts Agencies (NASAA)

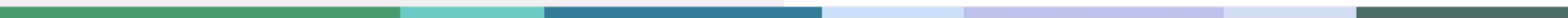
Land Acknowledgement

Our office is based in the Ancestral Wendat territory and the shared territory of the Anishinaabeg and the Haudenosaunee, covered by The Dish With One Spoon treaty, and later, Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

As a national organization, we acknowledge and are grateful for this land on which we work, play and create, that is still home to Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island. STEPS is committed to cultivating safer spaces for Indigenous voices to be heard. We encourage you to learn more about the land where you reside at native-land.ca.

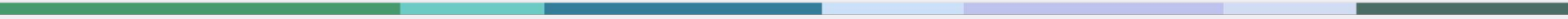


Agenda

1. Land Acknowledgment
 2. Introduction to STEPS
 3. Accessible Art and Placemaking Initiative
 - a. Project Overview
 - b. Key Findings
 4. Next Steps
 5. Q&A
- 



Introduction to STEPS Public Art





STEPS Public Art is a Canadian charity and social enterprise. We offer services in public art management, hoarding exhibits, cultural planning, and artist capacity building. We run charitable programs that support artists and foster vibrant and inclusive communities.

Why STEPS Public Art?

We're on a mission to engage and empower artists and communities to transform public spaces into vibrant places. What sets us apart is our commitment to working with equity-deserving artists to increase representation, diversity, and inclusion in communities and public spaces.

Our Vision

We envision a world where artists and communities co-create meaningful, welcoming, and safe public spaces.

Sculptural/3D Artworks



All I Have (2023) by Soheyl Bastami for The Eglinton Way BIA
Photo Credit: Alicia Reid



The Drum of Concordia (2024) by Ovvian
Castrillo Hill for the City of Fort St. John
Photo Credit: Janis Nual



Fetch (2023) by W.W. Hung for The Eglinton Way BIA
Photo Credit: Eglinton Way BIA

Murals



Just Imagine (2024) by Kseniya Tsoy for the Town of Stouffville
Photo Credit: Jason Montplaisir



Brampton Fire Station (2022) by Pam Lostracco for the City of Brampton
Photo Credit: Selina McCallum



Equilibrium Mural (2018) by Okuda San Miguel for Knightstone Capital
Photo Credit: Sharon Mendonca

Digital and Light Installations



Magic Windows (2023) by Ballinran Entertainment for Port Colborne BIA
Video Credit: Ballinran Entertainment



Beyond the Plate (2022) by Meegan Lim for the City of Brampton
Photo Credit: May Shi
Augmented Reality (AR) Credit: Jenn Liv



Yue Moon (2022) by PUFF Paddy for the Toronto Chinatown BIA
Photo Credit: May Shi

Functional Artworks



Painted Benches (2021) by Mahmood Hosseini for Clarkson Village BIA
Photo Credit: Selina McCallum



Chinatown CafeTO Tabletops (2020) by Yen Linh Thai and Jieun Kim for Toronto Chinatown BIA
Photo Credit: Selina McCallum



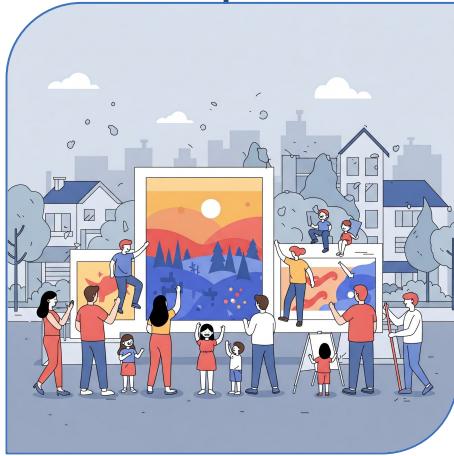
Mosaic Tables (2022) by Mehtap Mertdogan for Oakwood Village BIA
Photo Credit: Kyle Jarencio

Why Public Art?

Public art goes beyond the visual—it deeply has...



Social Impact



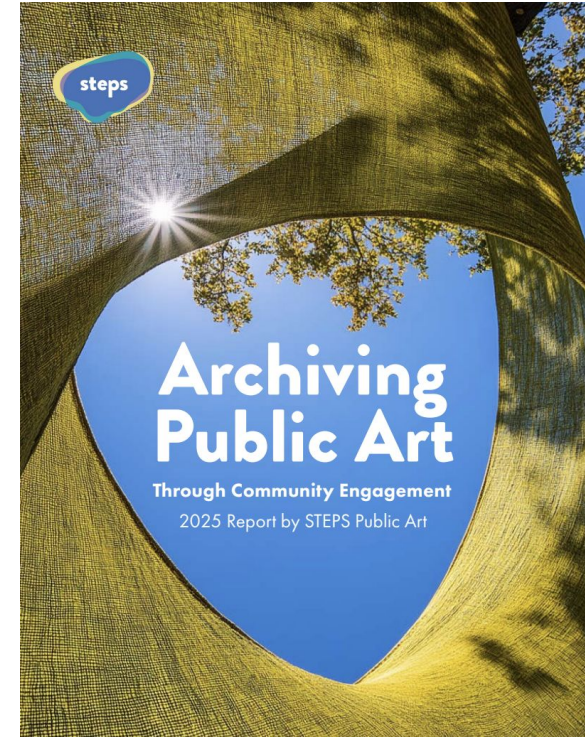
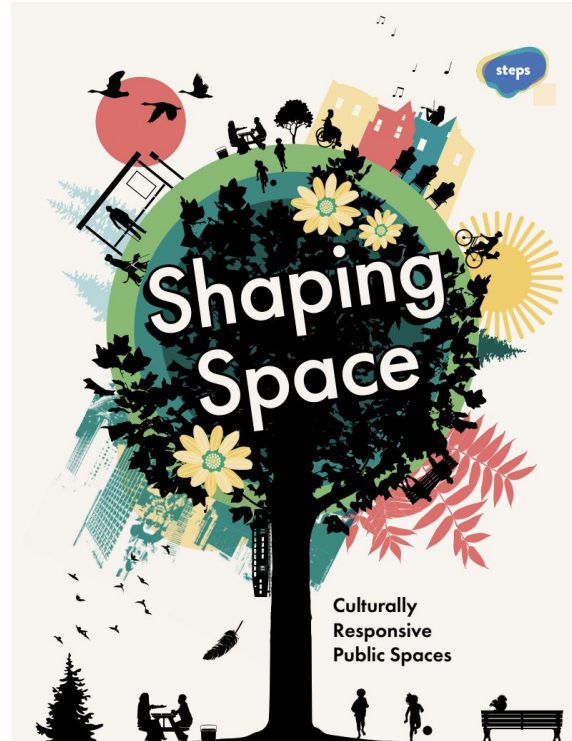
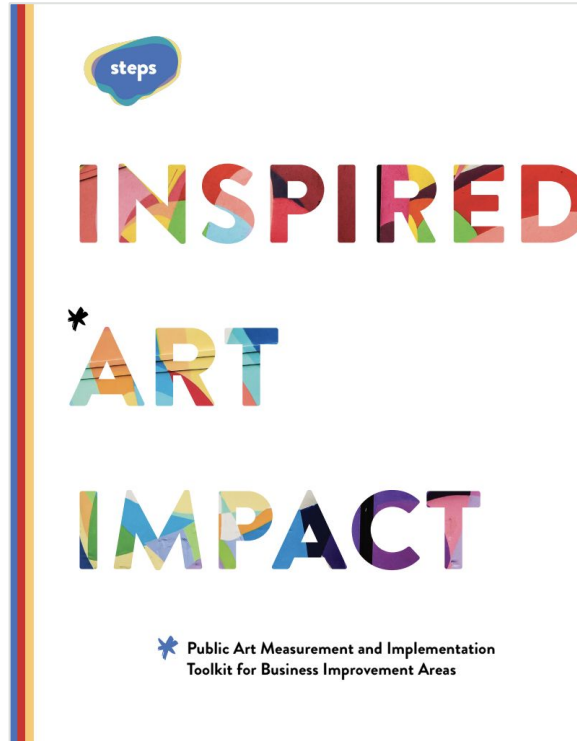
Cultural Impact



Economic Impact

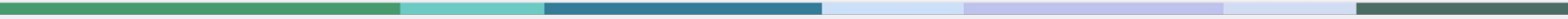


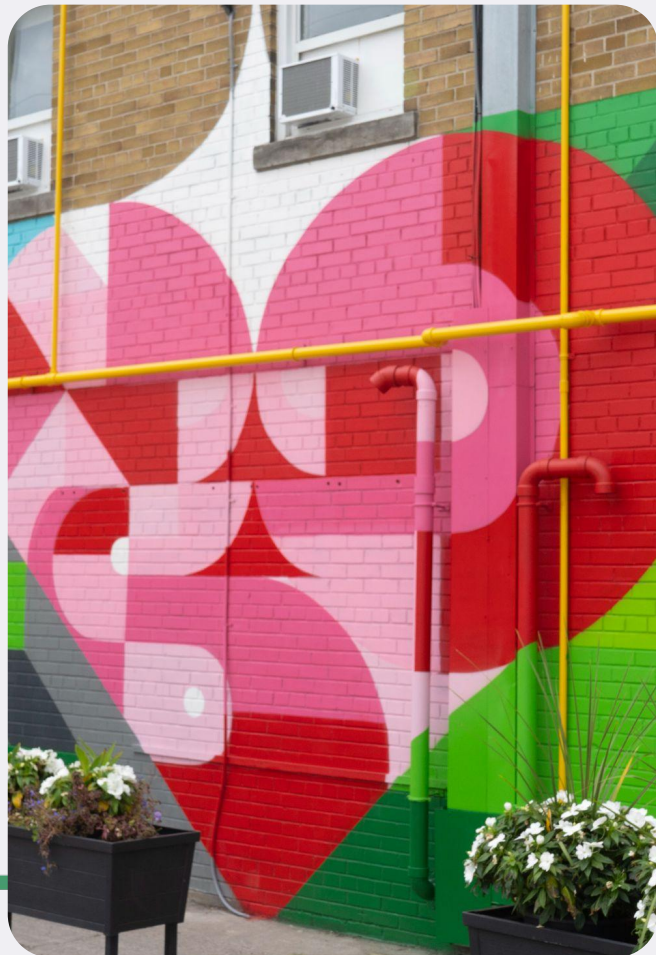
Research Dedicated to Encouraging Impactful Initiatives





The Accessible Art and Placemaking Initiative



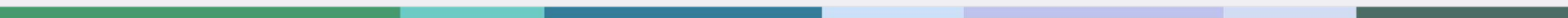


The Need

- While public art can increase access to artistic expression, **very few public art pieces are created with access needs in mind.**
- Most resources on art and accessibility focus on performing arts or museum experiences, and **public art stakeholders often lack the knowledge and resources** to support accessible placemaking.
- **More than 1 in 4 adults in the United States have some type of disability** (CDC data), and disability can touch each of our lives.
- As a powerful tool to disrupt harmful stereotypes, **public art can contribute to disability justice.**

“

“Accessibility should not be treated as a mere checkbox. Rather, it should be approached as an opportunity to broaden and enrich the scope of understanding between disabled and non-disabled communities.



2024

Accessible Art & Placemaking Toolkit



steps

Our Response

The toolkit details different types of art and placemaking installations that can promote enhanced accessibility. In addition, it includes recommendations to guide stakeholders in:

- Organizing accessible community engagement
- Identifying needs and challenges
- Selecting a site
- Engaging d/Deaf and disabled artists
- Facilitating accessible events
- Creating a safe and accessible space
- Communicating on activities to d/Deaf and disabled audiences
- Funding accessible projects
- Hiring service providers

Methodology

1

**Literature
review**



2

**Consultations
with experts**



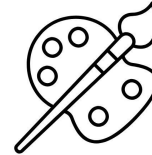
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Surveys



4

Pilot projects

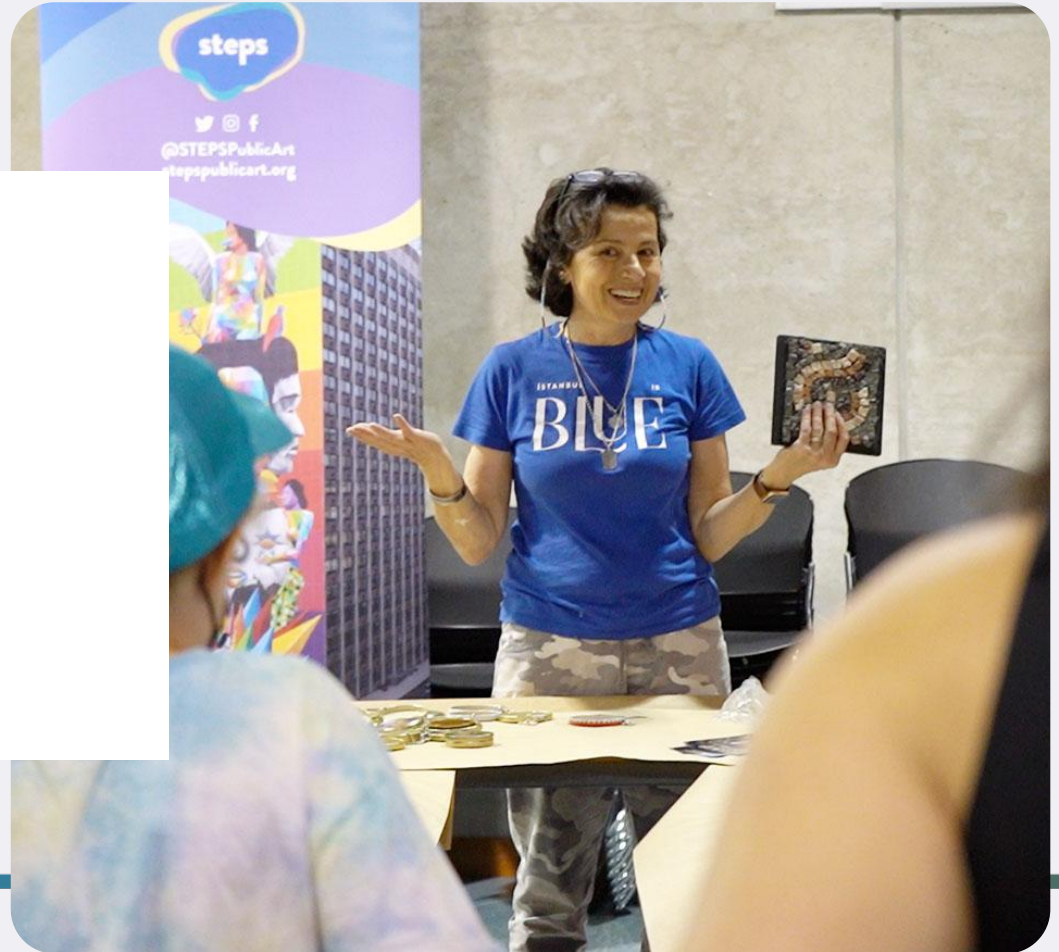


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**Feedback
collection**



Some Key Learnings



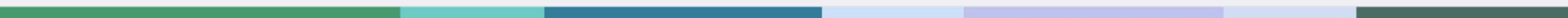
Integrating Accessibility Throughout

Accessibility is often an afterthought rather than a priority, with accessibility needs being considered after the fact, once the project is already underway. This results in limited and makeshift solutions.

On the contrary, **accessibility should be considered from the start, and considered at each phase of the project.**

A few questions can help guide reflection:

- How are including the voices of disabled community members at each stage of project?
- How will people, in particular disabled audiences, learn about the project?
- How can people get to the site?
- How will the public art and placemaking project be experienced? What senses will be used?
- What are the characteristics of the space surrounding the public art and placemaking project? What are the impacts of such characteristics?



Approach Considerations



- “Nothing about us without us”;
- No one size fits all solution;
- Being flexible and “failing better”;
- Being proactive and curious;
- Long term relationship building;
- Moving from a medical model to a social model of disability.

Community Engagement

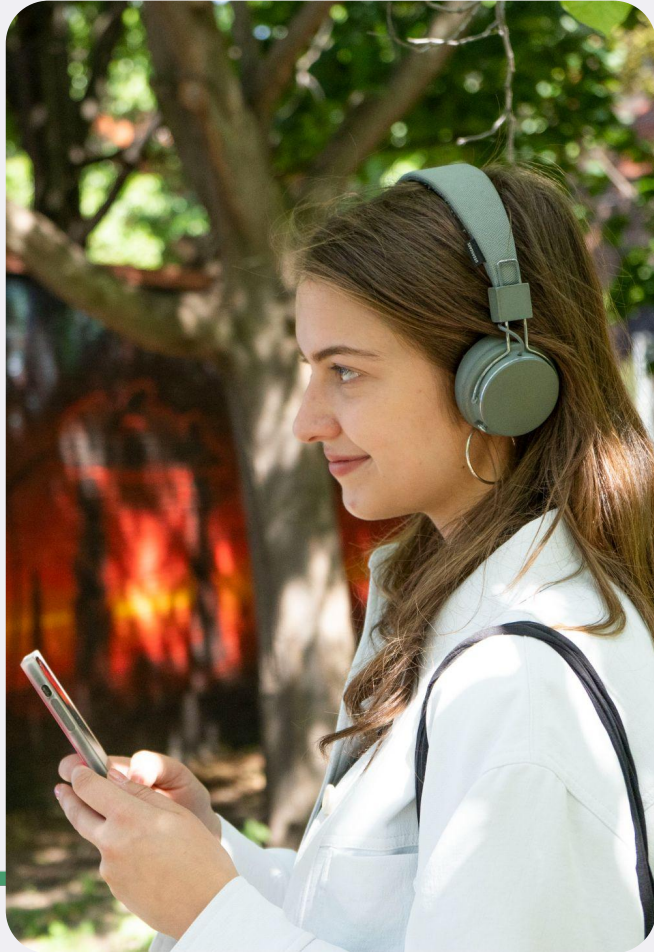


- Which channels are you using to connect with potential participants?
- How is the information communicated?
- How are you consulting the public?
- How are you choosing and preparing the location where the engagement will take place, for in-person consultations?

Case Study: Site Selection for a Tactile Map

- Two site visits, with a range of stakeholders with various access needs;
- Chosen for proximity an accessible station and available amenities.





Dedicated Projects

Creations targeting specific needs:

- Audio content;
- Tactile wayfinding;
- Seating; shade; ramps.

Multi-Sensory activations.

Projects showcasing a variety of identities.

Access Considerations for Public Art Projects

Marketing and Communications:

- Clear statements, plain language;
- Information to include: Access guides; content warnings; multiple ways to contact the organizer;
- Seeing disabilities: easy-to-read fonts; screen reader adapted formats; ALT text; large-print versions of the content; braille and tactile elements; audio description;
- Hearing disabilities: ASL; captioning;
- Providing multiple ways to contact the organizer of the project.

Venue / Physical Environment Considerations

- Consider available transportation and parking options;
- Seating; washroom facilities; shade and places to rest, taking into consideration different body types and access needs;
- Sensory friendly; scent-free; reduced noise spaces.

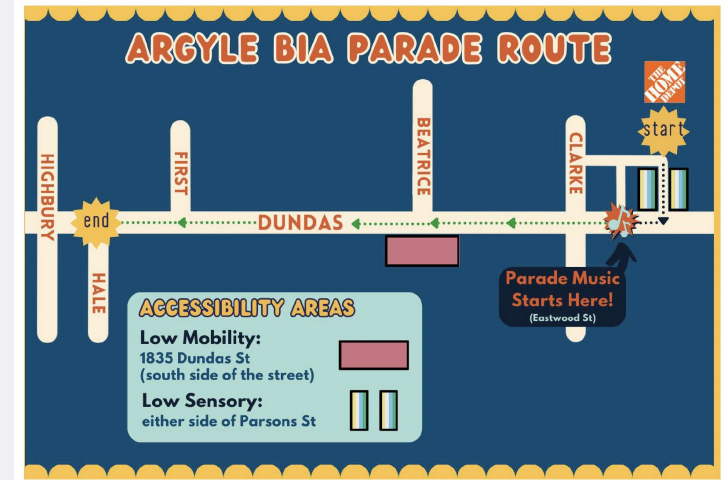
Staff and Volunteer Training

Accessible Signage

Case Study: Argyle BIA Events

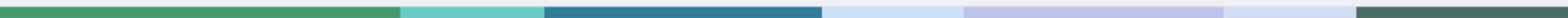
The Argyle Business Improvement Area, in London Ontario, has worked over the past years to improve the Accessibility of their events, such as the Santa Claus Parade. Adaptations have included:

- Sensory stimulation mindfulness
- Low Mobility Section and Paratransit
- Crowd Management and Seating
- Weather Considerations
- Staff Education



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To achieve something more meaningful, we must shift from the perspective of meeting the minimum requirements to being imaginative about the maximum level of acceptance and accessibility we can offer.



Accessibility Resources

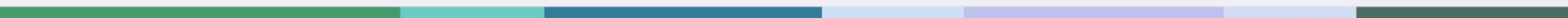
- Vital Practices in the Arts by Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology, and Access to Life (BIT), Tangled Art + Disability and Creative Users Project (Google Doc)
- Tangled Arts + Disability
- Free Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Training
- Arts AccessAbility Network Manitoba
- Why Accessibility? An Introduction to the AODA and Disability Justice (Video) by Constance Exley (CEO, Accessibility Services Canada) and Sarah Jama (Executive Director, Disability Justice Network of Ontario)
- The Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation Checklist (PDF), Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)
- Tips for Employers: Understanding Disability (PDF), David C. Onley Initiative for Employment & Enterprise Development
- Tips for Employers: Language and Disability (PDF), David C. Onley Initiative for Employment & Enterprise Development
- Employers Guide to Hiring and Working with Professionals with Disabilities (PDF), David C. Onley Initiative for Employment & Enterprise Development
- Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation: A Training Booklet for Small Private and Not-for-Profit Organizations (PDF), AccessForward/Vers l'accessibilité
- Employers' Toolkit: Making Ontario Workplaces Accessible to People with Disabilities, 2nd Edition (PDF), The Conference Board of Canada
- Building Disability Etiquette into the Workplace (PDF), David C. Onley Initiative for Employment & Enterprise Development
- Tips for Service Providers Communicating with Students about Workplace Accommodations (PDF), David C. Onley Initiative for Employment & Enterprise Development
- Tips About Disclosure (PDF), David C. Onley Initiative for Employment & Enterprise Development
- Support for Employers: Why Hire People with Disabilities? (PDF), Kootenay Career Development Society
- 10 Minute Training: Website Accessibility (Video), Smart Cause Digital
- Read Aloud: A Text to Speech Voice Reader
- Speechify: Text to Speech Reader
- Autism and Neurodiversity in the Workplace, Free Self-Paced Online Program by the University of British Columbia
- Accessibility Services Canada
- Accessibility Toolkit, Tangled Art + Disability
- EnAbling Change: Accessibility for Performing Arts (PDF) by Kristina McMullin
- Crip Times Podcast, Bodies in Translation
- Crippling the Arts Access Guide (PDF), Tangled Art + Disability
- Crippling Masculinity
- Who Can Experience My Posts? An Accessibility Guide to Everyday Social Media (Video), Culture Days
- EnAbling Change: Accessibility for the Performing Arts (YouTube playlist), Orchestras Canada
- Creative Users Projects
- Theatre Passe Muraille Accessibility Labs
- Making a Living in Disability Arts Toolkit and Masterclass Teachings by Shay Erlich
- Accessibility in Creative Spaces: A Toolkit for Ontario Arts Organizations, (PDF), ARTSBUILD ONTARIO
- Ontario Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility: Guide for accessible engagement (PDF), Ontario Municipal

Other Ways to Promote Accessibility

- Education & Advocacy — Sharing accessibility resources with members;
- Assessment — Collecting and sharing information on accessibility needs and existing initiatives in the community;
- Communication: Creating resources to help disabled community members navigate local organizations.

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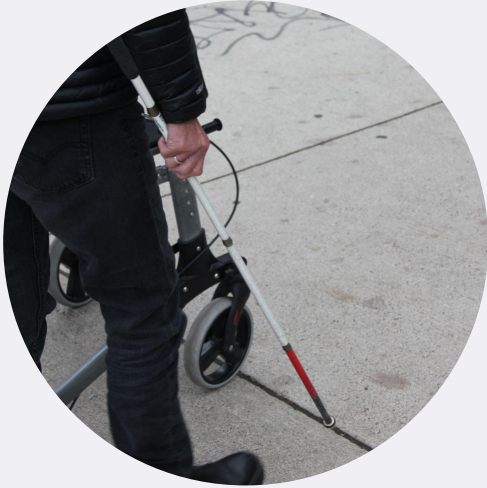
It is our hope that through continued discourse and shared resources, accessible art will become the standard and not the exception.



Pilot Projects



Bloor Annex BIA – Event and Tactile Map



May I Take Your Arm Event

Tactile Map Workshop



Bloor Annex Tactile Map, by ReDefine Arts



Cabbagetown BIA

Animated StopGap ramps and recordings of artist statements.

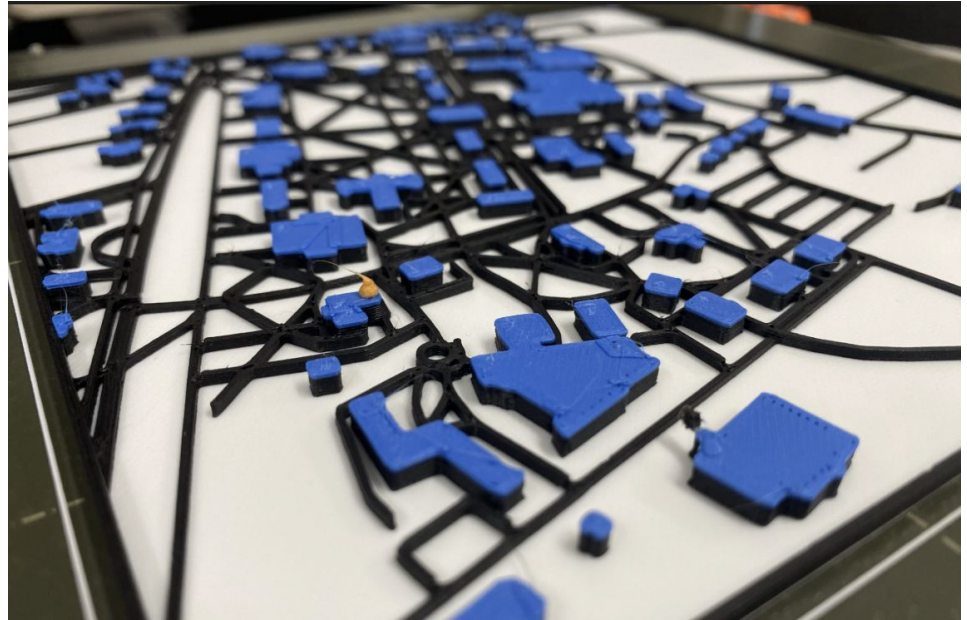
- Amanda Lederle, *We Are Here*
- Gloria Swain, *Disability*
- Wendy Lu, *The Light of Love, Hope and Peace.*

Next Steps



Continued Improvement on Tactile Creations

Current research projects, investigating improvements for affordable tactile formats.



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Fostering Vibrant Communities.



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