

## Starting the commitment to *Cultural Access* with an *Access Coordinator*

When an organization makes a commitment to *Cultural Access* the phrase “it takes a village” comes to mind, but the best start can often be to appoint an individual to be the organization’s **Access Coordinator**. As we all know a village needs a leader to ensure progress, and while access is everyone’s responsibility, it is critical to any long-term commitment to *Cultural Access* that there be a champion to oversee an organization’s accessibility process. An Access Coordinator will serve as an organization’s *Cultural Access* advocate, ensuring that all planning includes discussions on accessibility.

An Access Coordinator is sometimes, especially within larger federally funded entities, referred to as an ADA/504 Coordinator. The ADA/504 title references Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities and regulations reasonable accommodations including program accessibility and effective communication. However, regardless of specific title, the importance of an Access Coordinator is that there is oversight for an organization’s *Cultural Access* progress.

So what does an Access Coordinator do? They ensure that an organization’s programs, policies, and procedures are in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. At all times they encourage the removal of physical, intellectual and/or attitudinal barriers. But, most importantly, the Access Coordinator guides the organization’s staff to develop an accessible environment for the benefit of all visitors, participants, audiences and employees.

The appointment of an Access Coordinator will start an organization moving forward along the path to greater accessibility. However, remember that the newly appointed Access Coordinator will need assistance from their network, as well as access to appropriate resources, in order to push *Cultural Access* forward. The following entities are leaders in *Cultural Access* and offer supportive online resources.

- The [Office of Accessibility at the National Endowment for the Arts](#) has online resources and publications, including *Design for Accessibility: A Cultural Administrator’s Handbook*.
- [The Office of Accessibility at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts](#) hosts an annual conference (LEAD: Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability) and provides online resources, including tip sheets for Access Coordinators.
- The [Smithsonian Institution](#) offers a number of resources for museums specifically dealing with accessibility as related to collections and exhibitions.