

Background and History

In December 2010, White Bear Center for the Arts (WBCA) purchased an 8,000 square foot building on the northwest edge of White Bear Lake's downtown business district. A capital campaign was launched to fully transform this building and surrounding property into a comprehensive arts campus.

At the time, WBCA operated out of a city-owned building (the old Armory) in downtown White Bear Lake. This facility lacked many accessibility features and had only on-street parking. A key objective for the new campus was to “better serve students and artists in classrooms designed with appropriate ventilation, lighting, and ADA accessibility.” WBCA worked closely with its architect to meet and exceed ADA requirements in the new building. Visually impaired and mobility impaired clients assisted in the new building design and accessibility planning.

WBCA moved into its new building in July 2013, with final renovations completed in January 2014. The result is a 1.5 acre campus and 10,000 square foot building. The building features 3 studio classrooms, a full-time clay studio, art library, and a 1500 square foot gallery. Outdoors, the site features an outdoor courtyard adjacent to the building with direct access to studio classrooms, an outdoor walking labyrinth, an outdoor brick oven, and rain gardens. Key accessibility features include:

- Easy access to all areas of the one level building
- Fully accessible classrooms, with appropriate ventilation, lighting, and wheelchair-accessible sinks
- Fully accessible gallery, with exhibitions designed for safe navigation
- Wheelchair-accessible facility, including the reception desk at wheelchair height
- Well-lit onsite parking with designated handicap spaces
- Handicap-accessible doors and bathrooms
- Power assist entry and bathroom doors with extended open times
- Wheelchair-accessible drinking fountain
- Wheelchair-accessible outdoor workspaces for each studio classroom

Mission and Accessibility

The mission of WBCA is to provide a gateway to diverse arts experiences. In keeping with its mission and values, WBCA is committed to providing equal access to facilities, programs, services, and employment, without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, disability, sexual orientation, membership or activity in a local commission, veteran status, or age.

In 2016, WBCA’s board of directors approved a Diversity and Inclusion Statement that encompasses a full range of accessibility, including for people with disabilities:

Diversity and Inclusion Statement:

To ensure an atmosphere of joy and wonder for the White Bear Center for the Arts (WBCA) and that its programming is accessible to all members of the community, WBCA must be a culturally responsive center that reflects the diversity of our local area.

WBCA believes that diversity, inclusion and equity are essential to fulfilling our mission to provide a gateway to diverse arts experiences for all people in the Northeastern metro suburban area who wish to participate. WBCA embraces differences and commonalities across race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mental & physical ability, religion, age, and social economic class.

We believe that in order to build a more diverse membership, we must work to identify barriers and commit to removing these limitations.

We commit to expanding our awareness about, and representation in, the greater diverse arts experience and strive to make art an intrinsic part of everyday life.

To meaningfully and measurably foster a culture of inclusion we will focus on:

- 1) Building our cultural capacity through education, cultural training, and intentional engagement with diverse artists and audiences;
- 2) Providing accessible programs of relevance by engaging diverse artists in planning and delivery of programs at WBCA.
- 3) Seeking opportunities that expand outreach to diverse populations in our community.

WBCA stands behind the importance of long-term sustainable relationships built on genuine respect for the creative, social and cultural spirit of each individual. This initiative will be the bedrock for all action and planning done by the Board and Staff at White Bear Center for the Arts.

Accessibility Audit and Improvements

White Bear Center for the Arts recently completed an accessibility audit using a self-evaluation survey provided by Metropolitan Regional Arts Council. This survey evaluates accessibility in three categories: organizational practices, programs and services, and facilities. Below is a summary of existing accessibility and plans for improvements. WBCA completes periodic accessibility audits to review and update this plan.

Organizational Practices

WBCA has a board-approved Diversity and Inclusion statement, which states WBCA's commitment to providing arts experiences to all members of the community who wish to participate. All WBCA employees are empowered to accommodate the needs of participants.

WBCA has a designated coordinator (Executive Director Suzi Hudson) to facilitate compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Others engaged with accessibility include Associate Director Andy Vollbrecht and board member Peter Kramer (who is also the architect who designed WBCA's building).

Plans for improvement:

- WBCA's outreach and accessibility committee meets monthly to assess and evaluate the accessibility of programs and services. This committee's work helps identify needed improvements in regards to accessibility, including accessibility for people with disabilities.
- WBCA is researching accessibility training programs for staff to better understand how WBCA can better serve people with disabilities.

Programs and Services

WBCA's programs and services are open to all. Students are asked to notify the office in advance of any special requirements, and staff makes every effort to accommodate special needs. When accommodations are needed, the information is shared on WBCA's internal systems so those preparing classrooms know how to set up. WBCA includes accessibility symbols in its quarterly class catalogs, on the organization's website, and on postcards advertising exhibitions and events. WBCA makes class scholarships highly accessible, with no proof of need required.

Classes take place in WBCA's completely ADA-compatible, one level building. All classrooms are fully accessible to all, with appropriate ventilation, lighting, and wheelchair-accessible sinks. WBCA installed 75 inch televisions in two of its classrooms. Overhead cameras capture teaching artist demonstrations, which are displayed on these large screens. This makes demonstrations visible from any part of the classroom and eliminates the need for students to move to see what the teaching artist is doing. WBCA also has three portable microphone/speaker sets that teaching artists can use to amplify lessons.

For exhibitions, WBCA uses high contrast labels with appropriate fonts and text sizes for legibility. Labels are hung between 48 and 67 inches. Gallery lighting is set to ensure artwork and labels are easy to read. All exhibitions are installed with accessibility in mind: artwork is laid out so gallery visitors in wheelchairs or scooters are able to safely navigate the space. When WBCA's gallery has larger exhibitions, WBCA produces an exhibition guide for additional accessibility.

WBCA ensures the accessibility of its events, including lectures. Lectures are amplified through microphones and speakers. WBCA worked with a technical consultant to install a new AV/audio system in the gallery, which provides improved sound for lectures and presentations. When events include seating, easily accessible spaces are left open and designated for people in wheelchairs. Seating is flexible, and WBCA staff can easily remove chairs to create additional space for wheelchairs and walkers.

WBCA specifically promotes its programming to individuals with disabilities by partnering with local senior living facilities and organizations that serve people with disabilities. Outreach efforts include:

- WBCA partners with local senior living facilities to bring classes directly to residents. Classes are taught by professional teaching artists and have covered a wide variety of art forms, including watercolor painting, jewelry making, and dance. WBCA also provides class catalogs at these facilities.
- WBCA provides targeted, authentic, and high-quality art classes for people with disabilities by partnering with organizations such as Customized Options, On Our Own, and PAI. All classes are taught by professional teaching artists, provide lessons that celebrate individual exploration and self-expression, and use high-quality supplies. Some classes are taught at WBCA and others onsite at partner organizations.
- WBCA regularly hosts gallery and labyrinth tours for groups from senior living facilities or organizations that serve people with disabilities.
- Three days per week, WBCA provides work space to Bloom, a group of women with developmental disabilities, to practice Saori weaving. These artists also teach Saori weaving at WBCA.
- Classes are held at area libraries, providing additional program opportunities for those who may be unable to participate at WBCA's building.

Plans for improvement:

- WBCA plans to add a television and camera system to an additional studio classroom.
- WBCA will increase awareness of the accessibility of its programming by creating a page on its website devoted to accessibility. WBCA will also research accessibility-related websites for opportunities to market WBCA programs to more individuals with disabilities.

Facilities

WBCA's building and facilities are designed for full accessibility.

- There is easy access to all areas of the one level building, including studio classrooms, clay studio, gallery, library, reception area, and bathrooms.
- Classrooms are fully accessible, with appropriate ventilation, lighting, and wheel-chair accessible sinks.
- WBCA's parking lot has 5 designated handicap spaces (more than required by law) with adjacent or close access to walkways to the building entrance. The parking lot is well-lit at night.
- There are direct routes from the parking lot to building entrance: paved sidewalks kept free of snow and ice by WBCA staff, no stairs, and a covered entrance. WBCA has additional curb cuts beyond what is required. Entry doors are power-assisted with extended open times. WBCA's reception desk is just inside the front entry, which allows employees to immediately provide additional assistance to any guest who needs it.
- Restrooms have power assist entry doors with extended open times. Each restroom has an accessible stall, space to accommodate a turning wheelchair or walker, faucets accessible for a person in a wheelchair, and exposed pipes below sinks are covered with insulation.
- All power assist door systems were inspected and serviced most recently in summer 2018.
- The building has illuminated exit signs that run on battery backup in case of a power outage.

When the building opened, WBCA passed an inspection from the Fire Marshal. All three studio classrooms, the clay studio, the gallery, and the atrium have external doors to allow for easy evacuation of all constituents in the event of an emergency.

To ensure an accessible and safe facility for all patrons, WBCA employees prepare all classrooms and building areas prior to the arrival of teaching artists and students. All lights are turned on, tables and chairs are set up, and walkways/traffic areas are cleared. Spaces are physically ready for programs, no matter the ability of participants and visitors.

Plans for improvement:

- In response to program growth, WBCA recently purchased an adjacent property, which will be developed for additional safe, onsite parking. This will provide safer access (for pedestrians and people in wheelchairs) coming from nearby schools and senior living facilities.
- WBCA is in the midst of reviewing its building safety protocol. As part of this effort, staff will review evacuation procedures for people with disabilities. WBCA will develop a written emergency plan and post procedures for emergencies in studio classrooms.