

FEBRUARY 2021
EDITION 1

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presents

A Toolkit for Inclusion & Accessibility: Changing the Narrative of Disability in Documentary Film

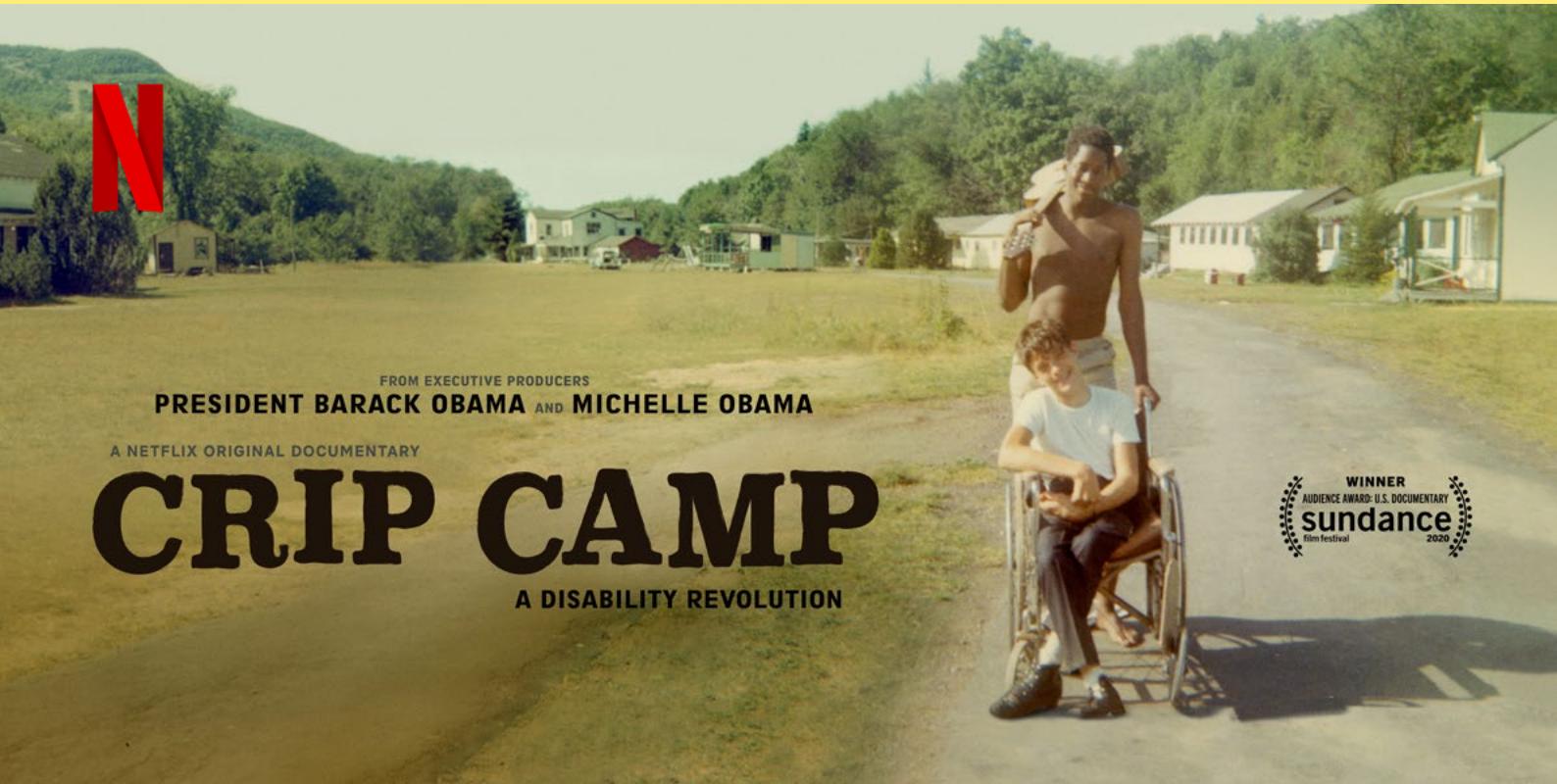


Image Description: A horizontal poster advertising the film 'Crip Camp, A Disability Revolution'. 1970's sunny outdoors, a young Black man, Alan Freeman, has a guitar over his shoulder and he stands, smiling, behind a white man, Neil Jacobson, who is using a wheelchair.

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Image Description: Crip Camp Co-Director Nicole Newnham, a white woman with shoulder-length blonde hair wearing glasses, sits smiling beside Co-Director Jim LeBrecht, a white man with curly hair and a goatee beard, also smiling.

Introduction

**by Nicole Newnham and Jim LeBrecht,
Co-Directors of *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution***

Our documentary film *Crip Camp* tells the story of Camp Jened, a groundbreaking summer camp that galvanised a group of teens with disabilities to help build a civil rights movement and forge a new path toward greater equality. When we set out to make it, we hoped to create an entertaining, universal and cinematic film that was imbued with authenticity, humour, courage and joy. We wanted to shine a light on disability as culture, and as a civil rights movement. Throughout our storytelling, we sought out ways to prioritise full representation of disabled people and deep collaboration with the disabled community. We were always searching for authenticity in the narrative, as a way to avoid the tropes about disability that are so often served up by the media. We hoped that *Crip Camp*, and the processes we crafted to make it, would contribute to changing the narrative of disability in film.

From the start, we tried to adopt a set of principles as we worked on our film. The examples we saw in the footage at Camp Jened and during the 26-day takeover of the federal offices in San Francisco in 1977 echoes our ethos. We had to make sure that all voices were heard and that the film was accessible to everyone.

We had to do our best to accommodate everyone's needs, be it because of their disability or because it made our edit room a place where people's home life mattered. We took on the needs of others as if they were our own. This supportive culture allowed everyone to contribute at their best and supported a collaborative creative process that shows itself in the final film.

Even as a filmmaking team that centres disability community and expertise, we didn't always get accessibility right in the early stages of our film's release, and we want to affirm that accessibility is a journey of learning that we are all on together. Our team and supporters including Higher Ground Productions, LaVant Consulting, Uncommon, Sundance Institute and Netflix have been extraordinary partners in bringing our film to the widest audience possible, and all have prioritised creativity, access, equity and excellence throughout this collaboration.

We're delighted that the filmmaking practices that we crafted and the lessons we learned making *Crip Camp* have inspired **FWD-Doc: Documentary Filmmakers With Disabilities** to create this Toolkit for Inclusion & Accessibility. We hope that one of the legacies of this film and the community that shaped it will be a revolution in how D/deaf and disabled people are portrayed on-screen, and how we are included in filmmaking. There are signs that we see that make us hopeful. The number of films and television shows that represent us in a true light are increasing and they're garnering critical acclaim. This toolkit, if adopted, will hasten the release of many more important and entertaining projects with stories that can push us all towards a better, kinder and more inclusive world.

As legendary disability rights activist Judy Heumann put it at our world premiere at Sundance Film Festival in 2020:

"Leaving this film, I'm glad that everybody is going to feel really good and that you've learned, but I think ultimately the question is, **what's next?** And **what are you committing yourselves to do**, in order to ensure that we label discrimination against disabled people as discrimination, and around the world we commit ourselves to working on ensuring that the **visibility of all people including disabled people, from all backgrounds, becomes a reality?**"

Nicole Newnham and Jim LeBrecht
Co-Directors of *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution*

February 2021

Executive Summary

I think we are all looking for this day in which people with disabilities are in films not because of their disability but because we are a part of society, and part of the fabric of life. That's the world I'm really shooting for us to see.

– Jim LeBrecht, Co-Director of *Crip Camp*



Image Description: The Crip Camp team including filmmakers Jim LeBrecht, Nicole Newnham (standing in the middle smiling and talking into a microphone) and cast members Denise Sherer Jacobson and Neil Jacobson are on stage with a group of people, several using wheelchairs. Behind them is a purple screen that reads 'Sundance Film Festival 2020'.

There are over 14 million disabled people in the UK today but despite making up over 20% of the UK population, D/deaf and disabled people are chronically under-served on-screen, behind the camera and as consumers of screen storytelling.¹

Currently, only **5% of the English arts workforce** declares a disability, with **2% in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.**² In broadcast, disabled people make up only **7% of the UK workforce.**³ In independent filmmaking, the numbers are unknown but predicted to be even lower. And those of us that experience multiple forms of oppression – including women, Black, indigenous, people of colour, and LGBTQ+ people – are significantly underrepresented within D/deaf and disabled filmmaking.

D/deaf and disabled film **audiences** are also chronically underserved: consistently underrepresented across all film platforms, particularly among cinema-goers, with the exception of video sell-through where they typically make up over 20% of purchasers.⁴ A minority of distributed films have been made accessible with **high-quality captions** and **audio description**.

Meanwhile, the **spending power** of disabled households is currently worth **£274 billion per year in the UK alone.**⁵

We find ourselves in an unprecedented moment of **creative** and **financial opportunity** for the UK film industry if we engage with **authentic** disabled-led storytelling and talent, make our media **genuinely accessible**, and better **understand** and **cater to** the 14 million D/deaf and disabled people in the UK who together make up an underserved, hungry and financially-resourced **audience**.

This Toolkit for Inclusion & Accessibility has been created by **FWD-Doc: Documentary Filmmakers with Disabilities** in association with **Doc Society** and supported by **Netflix**, to help the British film industry do just that with a view to **best practice, not just compliance**.

“The biggest barriers are prejudice and fear.”

Judy Heumann, disability rights activist

In writing this toolkit, we take inspiration from the values imbued in the making of multi-award-winning Netflix documentary *Crip Camp* (2020), co-directed and produced by Nicole Newnham and Jim LeBrecht, produced by Sara Bolder, and executive produced by President Barack Obama and Michelle Obama, Priya Swaminathan, Tonia Davis and Howard Gertler.

While the writers of this document are not *Crip Camp*'s makers, we are experienced D/deaf and disabled filmmakers united in community with **FWD-Doc** (pronounced 'forward doc'): a group of filmmakers with disabilities (FWDs) working in documentary film and our active allies. As a creative community, we're grateful for the opportunity to learn from this groundbreaking film

and from the **creative processes** that were employed in pursuit of **inclusion, equity, accessibility** and **excellence** for its filmmaking **team, participants** and **audiences**. This document summarises those learnings and offers them up to the UK film industry as a leading practice example, with the acknowledgement that achieving representative and accessible filmmaking, as *Crip Camp* demonstrates, is a journey we are all on together.

To address the question of *why* we are now calling upon the film industry to take action on inclusion and accessibility for D/deaf and disabled people, it's crucial to discuss **ableism**: "A phenomena that assumes the superiority of non-disabled individuals and perpetuates false perceptions of people with disabilities and discrimination against them." ⁶

"I see it every day when people neglect to consider that disabled people are everywhere yet fail to plan for their participation. I see it in classrooms that show films without captioning with desks that don't move; at campus events held upstairs with no elevator access; I see it in misrepresentations that present disabled people in the media as tragic and suffering or as brave and inspirational for doing everyday things."

Dr. Michelle Nario-Redmond, Professor of Psychology and Biomedical Humanities ⁷

Ableism can be described as: "the discrimination of and social prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that typical abilities are superior. At its heart, ableism is rooted in the assumption that disabled people require 'fixing' and defines people by their disability. Like racism and sexism, ableism classifies entire groups of people as 'less than' and includes harmful stereotypes, misconceptions, and generalisations of people with disabilities."⁸

In a media context, ableism can look like:

- Writing stereotypical characters with disabilities as objects of tragedy or inspiration
- Putting together a team that doesn't include D/deaf and disabled people
- Paying disabled talent less than non-disabled talent (or not hiring disabled people at all)
- The assumption that people with disabilities want or need to be 'fixed'
- Using disability as a punchline or mocking disabled people
- Refusing to provide reasonable accommodations
- Making a film that doesn't have audio description or closed captioning
- Using someone else's mobility device as a hand or footrest
- Choosing an inaccessible venue for a screening, meeting or event, therefore excluding some participants

- Talking to a person with a disability like they are a child, talking about them instead of directly to them, or speaking for them
- Using disability as a plot device, i.e. the motivation for a disabled person's actions directly links to their disability.

We recommend digging into resources like [Ableism 101 – What is Ableism?](#), [Sins Invalid Disability Justice Primer](#), [The Disability Visibility Project: Ableism: The Causes and Consequences of Disability Prejudice](#), and [Kimberlé Crenshaw: The urgency of intersectionality](#).

“Ableism, racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination will only end when we, as a society, hold ourselves accountable and no longer make excuses that condone past and current practices.”

Judy Heumann, disability rights activist



Image Description: Jim LeBrecht sits in a wheelchair smiling into the camera in a cozy living room. A large reflector, light and microphone stand are between him and Denise Sherer Jacobson, a white woman with curly hair in a power chair. She also smiles into the camera.

This toolkit presents the latest **facts and figures** about D/deaf and disabled people in film; offers a **case study** of methodologies used by the Crip Camp team; summarises the **economic opportunities** available through engaging authentically with D/deaf and disabled filmmakers, stories and audiences; proffers **tips and strategies** for change applicable across development, production, post, distribution and exhibition; and collects the **expert testimony** of a range of D/deaf and disabled filmmakers, including members of **FWD-Doc** and the **BFI Press Reset** campaign. The insights gathered in this toolkit come from **BAFTA, Emmy, RTS, BIFA, Independent Spirit, IDA** and **Sundance** award-winning filmmakers, and from the acclaimed filmmakers of the future, whose voices and value are yet to be uplifted in British filmmaking.

This is not an exhaustive guide, nor does it address the legal framework of the [UK Equality Act 2010](#) that requires companies to take positive steps to remove barriers and prevent discrimination. Instead, this document is intended to offer the film industry new **insights from talented D/deaf and disabled voices**, tangible **steps** that you can take and practical **ideas and processes** that you can incorporate, ideally from the very start of a production. Several of them can help you **save money and time**; all of them will help you embed disabled-led **expertise** in your practices.

There is no lack of D/deaf and disabled film **talent**, nor a lack of **audiences**. There is a lack of **opportunity** and **ecosystem** to connect this authentic, impactful filmmaking with the audiences that are hungry for it and the industry that will be enriched by it. For decades, D/deaf and disabled people, alongside other diverse and excluded groups, have called for equal representation and participation in media against a background of continuing **disempowerment** and **misrepresentation**.

“Disabled people continue to be the most underrepresented group. This year disabled people made just 5.8% of contributions off-screen, well below the national workforce estimate (17%); and they made only 8.2% of on-screen contributions [despite comprising 20% of the population].”

Fourth Diamond Report published by the Creative Diversity Network, January 2021⁶

The UK film industry is currently demonstrating that it does not value the **1 in 5 people** in Britain with disabilities, either as colleagues or audiences. More than 25 years after the creation of the [Disability Discrimination Act \(DDA\)](#) in the UK, and 30 years since the [Americans With Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) in the US, this has to change.

“For so many people, television and movies may be the only way they understand people who aren’t like them.”

Michelle Obama ¹⁰

If we now take this opportunity to improve D/deaf and disabled representation, inclusion and accessibility in film, we can welcome new voices and audiences **from the world’s largest minority, and create tangible benefits for our society, culture and economy.** Disability cuts across all identities and backgrounds. D/deaf and disabled people are also BIPOC, LGBTQ+, women and non-binary, parents and caregivers, all ages and from every economic group. Nearly all of us will have some experience of bodily vulnerability, illness and/or disability in our lives; a more inclusive and accessible film landscape **benefits us all.**

We encourage you to **share this toolkit** widely with your colleagues and teams, **dare to think differently** about including people and perspectives that you may not yet have worked with and **talk with us**, including through the following networks:

- [FWD-Doc: Documentary Filmmakers With Disabilities](#)
- [Disabled Artists Network Community \(DANC\)](#)
- [Disability Visibility Project](#)
- [Disability Arts Online](#)
- [Inclusive Cinema](#)
- [BFI Press Reset](#)
- [Disabled People in TV](#)

The Opportunity

I think there's just a lack of understanding of the enormous depth of stories that people in the disabled community [have to tell]. Ours is just one story from one period of time about a specific group of people. Disability cuts across every single strata of society, and within each of those intersections there are amazing stories that are waiting to be heard, waiting to be told.

– Jim LeBrecht, Co-Director of *Crip Camp*



Image Description: Rows of red cinema seats are full of people, and on stage are three women with microphones: Jennifer Brea, Lindsey Dryden and Anna Bogutskaya. On the screen behind them is an image of the poster for a film called *Unrest*. It shows Jennifer Brea lying down with electrodes connected to her hairline.

There is not just a social and ethical imperative to include D/deaf and disabled people in film and TV creation, consumption and representation but also a business imperative. Deaf/deaf and disabled audiences are chronically underserved in film. Recognising the significant presence of D/deaf and disabled audiences and expanding your inclusivity builds a more prosperous film industry broadly and increases the opportunities for success for a project individually.

The ‘purple pound’ – the spending power of disabled households – is estimated to be worth more than **£274 billion per year in the UK alone**, and rises by 14% per annum.¹¹

A recent survey by the disability charity Scope identified that **disabled people actively want to spend more on entertainment**, but are currently **limited by its inaccessible design.**¹²

The film and entertainment industry currently **underestimates** the audience that exists for accessible film, the increasing number of mainstream distributors that require it, and crucially the relatively **low cost** of producing high-quality accessible deliverables. [The Budgetary Implications of Accessible Filmmaking are detailed here.](#)

“Over 50% of the revenue obtained by most current films comes from translated (dubbed, subtitled) and accessible versions (captioned for the D/deaf, audio described for the blind and low vision).¹³

“7.5 million people have used subtitles to watch television, although six million of them do not have hearing loss.”

Ofcom, Television Access Services, Review of the Code and Guidance

The British film industry is currently missing out on **significant potential revenue** by ignoring the D/deaf and disabled market and users of access features, and by neglecting to make films more accessible to and representative of the audience.

But clearly, there are not just financial opportunities in making films more accessible; there are **creative** opportunities too. For filmmakers, access features like audio description (AD) and captions can be an opportunity to enhance **storytelling techniques** and **engagement** with the audience. Much like the highly-respected crafts of lighting, sound design, costuming, colour grading, or even the script itself, access features are integral to the **experience of cinema** for many millions of viewers around the world, and they too shape the impact of our storytelling.

Early thinking about how to eventually describe your film’s visual details in words in the audio description script can be an opportunity to generate even more specific and nuanced **choices with your department heads**, leading to visuals that are more fully intentional and emotionally resonant for all audiences. Planning the framing of your imagery to integrate it with on-screen captions can provide the opportunity to

more richly interrogate your **characters' perspectives**, as well as design on-screen text typography that aligns with your film's overall **aesthetic** and your characters' identities, both in the typefaces used and the graphic design of the text on-screen as it relates to the **meaning** of what is being communicated.

"Always assume that your audience will include people who need access features, and your art is actually not done until you've added those features and they have enhanced your storytelling."

– Cheryl Green, Filmmaker, Captioner and Audio Describer.



Image Description: The Crip Camp team and supporters are gathered on a stage, smiling and cheering: cast members Neil Jacobson and Denise Sherer Jacobson, executive producer Priya Swaminathan, producer Sara Bolder, filmmakers Nicole Newnham (who is holding Denise's hand) and Jim LeBrecht are being applauded by Sundance festival director John Cooper. Behind them all is a black and purple screen.

Crip Camp as a Case Study

“It’s been an extraordinary experience to get a sense of the impact that our film is having and I think that perhaps it’s shown the gatekeepers that there is a way of making films about disability that aren’t stuck in the old tropes. But that’s not going to happen very quickly if we’re not in the position of being producers, writers and directors. I think it’s the responsibility of the entertainment community and business to understand that we are a culture, we have a great deal of pride. If Crip Camp shows you anything, it’s that there are incredible stories out there that aren’t the same old, same old.

– Jim LeBrecht, Co-Director of *Crip Camp*



Image Description: A black and white photo from Camp Jened in the 1970s. Disabled teenagers, some in wheelchairs, some sitting on the ground, are in a circle and smile at the camera. Text overtop says 'Winner IDA Documentary Awards, Best Feature Crip Camp'.

Feature documentary *Crip Camp* (Netflix, 2020), directed and produced by Nicole Newnham and Jim LeBrecht, produced by Sara Bolder and executive produced by President Barack Obama and Michelle Obama, offers an empowering example of a world-class collaborative film production whose methodologies ensured disabled inclusion and access **on-screen, behind the camera** and for **audiences**.

Infused with the spirit of the disability movement's mantra, "**Nothing About Us Without Us,**" the film is a significant milestone in disability representation and inclusion and attracted global distribution on Netflix and critical acclaim. Filmmakers and film participants with disabilities are empowered to tell their own stories with authenticity. Together they create an entertaining and universal piece of cinema, featuring a playful and nuanced representation of valued lives. In turn, they challenge and shape attitudes towards, assumptions about and expectations of disabled people in the world.

Collaboration

An essential component of the working ethos on *Crip Camp* was a collaboration that valued everyone's expertise. This was built on trust, making the time and space to elevate everyone's voices, and ensuring that the needs of everyone on the team, whether connected to disability or not, were welcome in the working environment. Nicole and Jim had already collaborated on several films together (Jim as a sound designer and mixer on Nicole's films, and Nicole as an award-winning director experienced in working equitably with marginalised communities). Their co-directing partnership brought everyone's skill sets to the fore and enabled powerful interactions with film participants.

Nicole Newnham: "*Corbett O'Toole, who is this extraordinary activist in the film, said [during her interview], 'This is really nice. It's really nice to be interviewed by a director who has a disability.' He wasn't going to ask her to put her shoes on and get out of bed on camera, or any of that bit of Othering that often goes on when we non-disabled people try to show people with disabilities and how they live. It was about the way Jim was looking at the world.*"

This trusting collaboration also empowered the co-directors to navigate the demands of both co-directing a film and one of them featured in it.

Nicole Newnham: "*We were completely capable of having both these very intimate internal conversations [about Jim's life] and then these more film structure conversations, and as a co-director, Jim was a part of putting on different hats and doing all of that [as one of the participants in the film] even while things were very raw and difficult.*"

This process of trust-building and collaboration demonstrates the richness that storytelling forms can take when those with lived experience are in senior positions on productions.

Authentic empowerment

Empowering people with disabilities and people from other marginalised perspectives to tell their own story was embedded in the values and actions of the *Crip Camp* editorial team, and directly benefited the storytelling dynamic. The filmmakers worked with archive footage captured by The People's Video Theatre during the days of the camp, and collaborated with legendary activist and camper Judy Heumann and several other campers and camp staff before, during, and after filming.

Nicole Newnham: "We kept having screenings to the disability community. We would caption and audio describe cuts during the editing process so that we could show them to folks and get back impressions from people with disabilities. And we really accepted that it was not going to be done until we had a film that people responded to as 'Yes, that's the authentic experience.'"

"And sometimes things that we might do in another film that would be great, actually we discovered with this film they would bump people's minds over into an 'inspiration porn' way of seeing the story, or into 'Oh God, tragedy'. So we were always trying to figure out ways that we could avoid that. Our 'secret sauce' became emotional complexity. So we were going for a 'laughing through your tears' kind of a feeling. Things that were so complex that they could feel true and authentic. Because I think unfortunately a lot of people's brains have been worn down or just co-opted by the paucity of authentic disability representation and the tropes that the media serves up.

"We just kept, kind of like a sculpture, honing away at it until we felt we had something that was an authentic representation of the experiences and we had got to those truths."



Image Description: A group of smiling filmmakers and executives is gathered together in front of a purple Sundance Film Festival press backdrop. From left to right: Priya Swaminathan, Tonia Davis, Howard Gertler, Nicole Newnham, Jim LeBrecht, Lisa Nishimura, Ariane Wu and Adam Del Deo.

Accessibility

Thinking about accessibility in terms of physical barriers was important throughout the filmmaking process, and the team ensured that everyone, including wheelchair users, could get to and from locations for interviews, shoots and post-production. This was an important consideration during filmmaking, but also throughout the process of distribution, festivals, awards. Physical access is crucial to all events that are important to a film's life cycle.

The team at Netflix worked proactively with the filmmakers to support the logistics of attending the film's world premiere at Sundance Film Festival 2020, the National Ability Centre (NAC) provided accessible transportation to the film's cast during the festival in snowy Park City, Utah, and the film festival considered the access needs of *Crip Camp*'s cast and crew.

Jim LeBrecht: "At Sundance, they removed chairs to make sure that the cinema was accessible for all of the film crew to be able to sit together on the opening night, and the whole team was able to fully embrace the experience because it wasn't being held back from people on the team with disabilities."



Image Description: The *Crip Camp* team including (in order) Neil Jacobson, Judy Heumann, Nicole Newnham, Jim LeBrecht and Denise Sherer Jacobson are sitting in a crescent in front of a purple Sundance backdrop.

Accessible deliverables

The experience of crafting accessible deliverables centred around engaging with the disabled community on appropriate language use, as well as finding creative ways to craft rich audio description and captioning so that these accessibility features would further enhance the experience of the film and its characters. Through working with the community and with the scripts for captioning and AD, the filmmakers were able to capture nuances that might otherwise have been missed.

Nicole Newnham: “[Captions were] something we experimented with a lot actually, with our editors and with each other. What we found is, using a standard subtitle treatment with the folks who have Disability Affected Speech was frustrating, because often the sentence would come up on the screen and then the punchline of the joke or the thing that they were saying would happen in their voice five or six seconds later, and we wanted people to experience the way that our characters were speaking in real-time. We also felt that the way those particular characters spoke was very poetic and powerful and we wanted to honour that. It was Lauren Schwartzman, our associate producer, who started playing around with something that looks a little bit more like beat poetry, moving the placement around so that your eye didn't have to always go down to the bottom of the screen, and it's lifted up so you're able to see what we think was the most important thing in the frame more easily. That's how that evolved.”



Image Description: A black and white film still of a smiling, teenage Denise Sherer Jacobson sitting with other Camp Jened campers in the 1970's, with 'But it was utopia' written over top in a jaunty style.

Impact strategy

A major starting point for *Crip Camp*'s impact strategy was based around asking people in disability activism, 'How do you think this film could be most useful?' Through hiring experienced disabled talent and engaging with the disabled community and its allies from within, the impact strategy set its goals to promote understanding of disability as a social justice issue and build relationships across lines of difference. They prioritised four main elements: leadership development, community and cross-movement building, education and capacity building for people with and without disabilities.

The series of online workshops that they hosted online during 2020, on various topics surrounding disability including intersectional movement work, was attended by over 10,000 people including President Barack Obama.

Andraéa LaVant, founder of LaVant Consulting, which specialises in helping brands "speak disability with confidence", and *Crip Camp* Consultant and Impact Producer: *"We have a lot of work to do as a society in terms of representation. I've always placed myself in the mainstream, and my goal is to infiltrate spaces that those with disabilities have never been before."*



Image Description: President Barack Obama and Andraéa LaVant on a video call. Both are smiling into the camera. Barack wears a blue button-up shirt and Andraéa wears black-rimmed glasses, a wide-brimmed hat that says 'Crip Camp' and a camp counsellor style outfit.

Making difficult discoveries and learning from them

Although *Crip Camp* is a disabled-led film and it centres around the experiences of people with disabilities, there were instances in which the team was still learning about best practice for accessibility and inclusion, and they didn't always get it right the first time. For example, the devices providing closed captions for D/deaf viewers malfunctioned at the film's second Sundance screening, and an open-captioned copy of the film hadn't yet been made to use as an alternative. For all filmmakers, it's important to acknowledge that learning journey, and recognise that even knowing a subject firsthand and working within a community, we can still make mistakes. At Sundance, Netflix supported the urgent creation of an open-captioned copy of the film. In fact, the open-captioned version is what ALL audiences experienced once it was available. In this way, the *Crip Camp* team were able to invest even more deeply in accessibility features for the film's release going forward.

As news of the film's release started to circulate, the team received an email from an internationally known Deafblind activist asking if there would be a transcript that could be downloaded so that this community could experience *Crip Camp*. Without blinking an eye, Netflix agreed to create this and so opened up the film to an even wider audience.



Image Description: In a home location, Jim LeBrecht, a white man with curly hair and a goatee beard, sits in a power chair behind a microphone suspended on a stand, while he interviews a woman with short grey hair who has her back to us. Jim and his interviewee are surrounded by lights, cameras, cables on the floor and three film crew members.

Visibility

One of the most important takeaways for the team working on *Crip Camp* was, as co-director Jim puts it, “If not now, never”. The filmmakers were aware that they would inevitably come up against people’s bias and sometimes ableist ways of seeing disability. So they were proactive about seizing the moment for full visibility and representation with this film, and they built partnerships with supporters like Netflix, Higher Ground Productions, Consulting, Uncommon and Sundance Institute, who were ready to join them in pushing through barriers at last.

Disability rights activist Judy Heumann: “I’m hoping that this film not only educates people about the movement, but really enables non-disabled people and people with disabilities, visible and invisible, to recognise the power of story and how this can help make reforms that are so desperately needed in every country.”



Image Description: Nicole Newnham looks forward, intently, while sitting beside a large camera and film light on set. She is watching action in front of her, while two male crew members watch beside her.

Why Make Film Representation of Disability More Equitable? And How...

“Disabled people in film, on television, and in other forms of media should reflect the reality of our lives—our joys, sorrows, struggles, victories, and the everyday issues we all face. Only then will we be able to effectively counteract the themes of our being invisible or seen only as incapable, a drain, a tragedy.

– Judy Heumann, disability rights activist ¹⁴

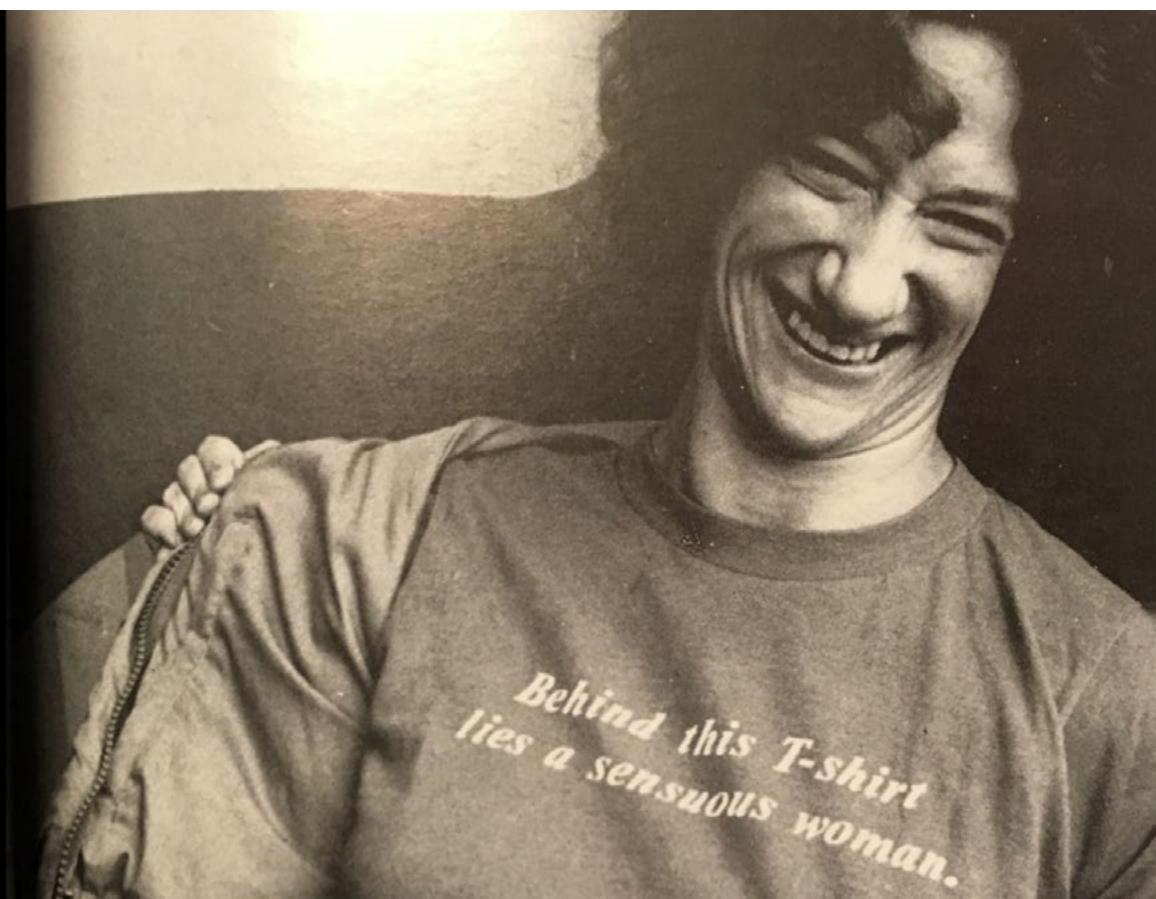


Image Description: A black and white photo of Denise Sherer Jacobson, a white woman with dark curly hair in her early 30's, grinning widely. Her t-shirt says "Behind this T-shirt lies a sensuous woman".

The real-world impact of D/deaf and disabled representation cannot be overstated.

"Keah Brown wept uncontrollably when she saw the documentary *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution* at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2020.

"I couldn't believe that that was the first time I had seen a disability narrative that wasn't steeped in self-hatred," explains Brown, a millennial writer and activist who has cerebral palsy. "It was just really refreshing to laugh, and cry, and to get excited about a future where disabled people can tell stories like this one, and not have to hide it under the guise of, 'How does this make a non-disabled person feel better about themselves?'"¹⁵

There is a long history of minimal, stereotypical and often harmful representation of D/deaf and disabled people in film.

"Stereotypes which medicalise, patronise, criminalise and dehumanise disabled people abound in books, films, on television, and in the press. They form the bedrock on which the attitudes towards, assumptions about and expectations of disabled people are based. They are fundamental to the discrimination and exploitation which disabled people encounter daily and contribute significantly to their systematic exclusion from mainstream community life."¹⁶

Colin Barnes, author of *Disabling Imagery and the Media*

Meanwhile, representation of disability by non-disabled filmmakers continues to benefit non-disabled people and often ableist points of view.

In Hollywood, "59 non-disabled actors have earned Oscar nominations for playing disabled characters. History suggests that those nominees have nearly a 50% shot at a win."¹⁷

In fact, "No disabled actor has won an Oscar since [Marlee] Matlin's 1987 victory. Yet since 1989, the majority of Best Actor Oscars have gone to men playing the sick or disabled."¹⁸

“We continue to hear ‘representation matters’, and yet representation often leaves out 15% of the global population, and that’s people with disabilities. That’s a billion people, which actually means we’re the largest minority in the world. And yet we’re still fighting for equity in every facet of life. ... We’re not a monolith, we all have varied experiences. It’s also [about] recognising the experiences of those of us that experience multiple forms of oppression; Black, indigenous, people of colour, the LGBTQ community.”

Andraéa LaVant, *Crip Camp* Impact Producer

We asked D/deaf and disabled filmmakers from FWD-Doc, Press Reset and beyond to highlight their priority advice for better D/deaf and disabled representation on-screen. Several key recommendations arose repeatedly:

1. Treat disabled people (and characters) as people with the full complement of strengths and flaws.

- “Understand three things about us before you attempt to tell our stories: 1) That disabled people are **people first**. 2) That we are **not inherently ‘inspirational’** and equally our lives are **not inherently tragic**. 3) That many of us are proud of our disabilities; that we accept ourselves and often see our differences as a gift.” – Actor, Writer
- “Disabled people should comprise around 20% of the characters in the media, representative of the one in five Britons who have a disability. Their roles should take **all forms**, from a romantic lead to a drug dealer to a barista.” – Activist and Writer
- “Stop centering stories solely on people’s disabilities, and stop the **harmful stereotypes**.” – Actor

2. Be willing to bring D/deaf and disabled expertise into your projects from the beginning and respect their knowledge and recommendations.

- “Look at examples of successful films/shows about disability that have been **embraced by D/deaf and disabled audiences**, like *Crip Camp*, *Vision Portraits*, *When I Walk*, *Unrest*, *This Close* and most recently *CODA* ([which was bought by Apple for \\$25 million at Sundance 2021](#)). Think about what they’ve done to earn that embrace (you’ll usually find D/deaf and disabled expertise right at the heart of the filmmaking).” – Producer/Director

- “Able-bodied filmmakers often fall into the trap of ‘**inspiration porn**’ and this can be seen at a very high level by respected and award-winning filmmakers as a good thing. In one recent documentary example, able-bodied filmmakers had a profound misunderstanding of disability and the disabled community and felt that by crewing the film with disabled filmmakers at junior (non-decision-making) levels they could make a film with integrity. But it didn’t have integrity because it is **pity porn** and contributes to the trope that disabled people are in some ways inspirational for triumphing over adversity. The one simple thing they didn’t do was **ask disabled filmmakers** about good and bad representation on-screen.” – Director
- “Recognise that there is **no one unified experience of disability**, and talk to a range of people with lived experience during filmmaking, from the very beginning of your process. Collaborate with a **variety** of D/deaf and disabled voices to understand the nuances of the experience you’re representing, pay them for their expertise (even a small fee), and actually implement their editorial advice (what’s the point of asking for insight if you ultimately override it with your non-disabled expectations of how a film should be made?).” – Producer/Director



Image Description: Lindsey Dryden, a young white woman with long dark hair carries a tripod, and Marcus Chandler, a young Black man with short dark hair, carries a camera, outdoors with the sun shining behind them.

3. Try to understand the systemic nature of exclusion and oppression as it applies to disability and how that shapes the lives of individuals. It impacts real lives; it will impact your project/story.

- “Understand the **social model of disability**: essentially that a person isn’t ‘disabled’ by their health condition or the ways they differ from what’s thought to be the medical ‘norm’; rather it’s the physical and attitudinal barriers in society – prejudice, lack of access adjustments and systemic exclusion – that disable people. Once you understand this, you start to understand why D/deaf and disabled people are desperate to see **on-screen depictions of ourselves that actually value our lives and experience**, and why inspiration porn and ‘disability as tragedy’ and ‘overcoming disability’ tropes are so offensive.” – Producer/Director
- “Portraying disability as negative can be harmful. Imagine watching a film in which **your life experience is portrayed as the worst thing that could ever happen to a person** – how would that affect you? Media done badly makes people feel worthless.” – Producer & Director
- “The filmmaking community needs to understand the **social and medical models of disability**. All public funders and awards bodies should be educated on current thinking in disability politics and opinion, so the same mistakes don’t happen again and again.” – Actor, Writer, Director

4. Examine the protocols and processes you use in your creative projects to see if they are exclusionary or based on harmful stereotypes. If so, change them.

- “Disabled people are seen as **risks**. It’s embedded in film protocol, this needs to be rethought as our stories, attributes and skills should be what we’re remembered for.” – Actor, Writer, Activist
- “I have had producers compare working with disabled people as a risk because our ‘needs are unpredictable, like working with babies or animals on set’. I’m not writing about this experience in search of pity; I want people to know what attitudes we are viewed with and how much work needs to be done to undo ableism in the industry.” – Actor, Writer, Activist

For Film Critics

"Critics are, themselves, creators of art. It's an art that's usually funneled through the medium of journalism, but criticism is still fundamentally an art form. Criticism is about expanding a work of art, making it part of a cultural conversation and discourse. It gives it air. It opens it up for the reader to have an experience with it. This is why criticism needs to be diverse. Critics try to read a film through the lens of their own unique experience, and that gives life to the work of art. Even when we all sit in the same movie theater, we all watch a different work of art. Adding those perspectives to the chorus can only enrich and expand the movie." ¹⁹

Alissa Wilkinson, Writer



Image Description: Nicole Newnham and Jim LeBrecht are in front of a purple press wall. The hand of a white person holds a microphone out in front of Jim.

Film criticism is a crucial contributor to representation and **equity in society**, and a skilled writer will inform themselves about **authentic** portrayals of disability, recognise misconceptions and tropes, and take steps to **avoid ableist language and interpretations** of films (tools for this included below).

If authentic films are made by authentic voices but on release only reviewed by writers with no insight into that authenticity, then they are immediately disadvantaged in the **crucial independent cinema pipeline** that leads directly from enthusiastic festival reviews to sales and distribution deals to awards to 'success'. The nuance and artistry of narratives that avoid the **pervasive misrepresentations** of disability that have dominated culture for decades (e.g. '**inspiration porn**', '**disability as tragedy**') can be invisible to critics if the **lens** they are viewing through is an ableist one.

If critics themselves have an unconscious bias against disability, harmful stereotypes will not only be reinforced but promoted. It is essential that writers **assess their own lens**, experiences and beliefs that may lead them to unconsciously **devalue** disabled lives. It is necessary for critics to keep in mind that, even in the case that a film is made by a disabled person, about disability, ableism can be so **pervasive and internalised** that disabled-led films also need to be held accountable for perpetuating stereotypes in storytelling. Critics must devote the **same attention** to ableism as they do other forms of discrimination in cinema and TV, and invest time in exploring **intersectionality** and the multiple forms of discrimination enacted upon D/deaf or disabled people who also occupy other marginalised identities. A crucial tool for any of us to understand our ableism (including, for disabled people, our internalised ableism) is understanding the **social model of disability**. In addition, we all benefit from reading the work of **disabled film critics** (some identified below), actively identifying tropes and stereotypes in media (See Glossary), and reflecting upon whether a film values disabled bodies as equal to non-disabled bodies.

To help **broaden the lens**, useful resources for writers include:

The [American Psychological Association's Style Guide](#) to inform journalists writing about disability.

The [Journalist's Toolbox: Writing about people with disabilities](#)

The [Journalist's Resource: 4 key tips for reporting on and writing about people with disabilities](#)

"I think for some reason, there's still a kind of nervousness among critics to think about disability. For some reason, they don't have the language, or they feel they don't have the language. And it's something that they still treat with a hands-off sort of 'put that over there' attitude that doesn't really lend itself to actual conversation and discussion. And this relates to how they actually see movies with disabled characters and think about them. This might explain why you still see terms like 'wheelchair bound' or 'crazy' or things like this still creeping into people's language."

Film critic Angelo Muredda, interviewed by writer and activist Alice Wong²⁰

"I think that's because a lot of the things that I see as tropes and that other [disabled] people see as tropes haven't really been identified. Most people know what racism in movies looks like. They know what misogyny in movies looks like. They can disagree with those assessments, but they know it when they see it. Most people don't know ableism in movies."

Film critic Kristen Lopez, interviewed by writer and activist Alice Wong²¹

We commend the Sundance Film Festival for its [Press Inclusion Initiative](#). Described as an "effort to cultivate a **more representative press corps** at the Sundance Film Festivals by providing top-tier **access** to freelance critics from underrepresented communities," it has been supported by Critical Minded, Netflix, Open Society Foundations, and Rotten Tomatoes, and places "an emphasis on people of colour, women, and people with disabilities." In addition to providing support in navigating accreditation, attendance and reporting, Sundance is providing grants to defray travel and lodging costs.

At 2020's festival, the initiative supported 51 critics' access to the event: "61% women, 84% people of colour (including 51% women of colour), and 49% LGBTQ+ people. 25% of successful candidates are people with a disability."²²

We also applaud the [London Film Festival Critics Mentorship Programme](#) and encourage it to include disability in its intersectional work going forward. We encourage other festivals and exhibitors to be similarly **proactive** in **supporting** and **developing** D/deaf and disabled professional critics and to interrogate the **lens of ableism** that is often applied by non-disabled writers when writing about D/deaf and disabled stories and characters. We also urge press outlets to **hire** D/deaf and disabled critics to write about **all films, not just those with a D/deafness or disability connection.**

"If shame around disability—what we reveal when we refuse to look, to witness, to surrender the illusion of sameness, or to accept that disability justice is not a matter of individual overcoming—is in fact the enemy of the story, then recognising our own role as critics in perpetuating that shame can only help us tell better ones. I hope we can eventually move beyond these patterns in order to afford stories about disability, and those by disabled creators, the kind of critical weight and complexity they deserve."

Laura Dorwart, Writer

How to Make Films More Accessible for Audiences

I think you have to think about audio description [and captioning] as not like a textbook but like a beautiful novel. And if you really approach it that way, that it's not just functional, that the art involved with it is really important, then that's going to be a guiding light for you.

– Jim LeBrecht, Co-Director of *Crip Camp*



Image Description: Filmmaker Rodney Evans, a man of colour in his 30s, stands behind a camera and looks into the viewfinder contemplatively. The light all around him is red.

This document is not the place to detail Ofcom's and the UK Equality Act 2010's legal framework and requirements for accessible deliverables in television and film, which can be explored via organisations like the [Independent Cinema Office](#), [3PlayMedia](#), [RNIB](#), [RNID](#) and [Ofcom](#). Instead, we refer to the making of *Crip Camp* because it highlights the rich possibilities of creating quality accessibility features for audiences — audio description and captioning (for definitions see page 54 of this document) — as **best practice, not just compliance**.

Accessibility lessons from *Crip Camp*

“Accessibility has always been a hurdle for me throughout my life. For me as a wheelchair user, it was about steps and ramps. Doorways and places to gather with my friends. One of the first lessons I learned when I became an activist for people like me, was that I had to think and advocate for those that didn't have my kind of disability, as well. This is a lesson for everyone. Why should anyone care about you and your needs if you don't consider theirs?

As we worked on *Crip Camp*, the feedback and guidance we received from others was important. And what I've come to realise and embrace is that **accessibility isn't just for those who are D/deaf or disabled** - it's for everyone. We don't live in a vacuum. We have many in our lives that don't identify or have disabilities. But if we're going to have the best chance at being a full participant in their lives, we have to be able to share the world that they have an easier time navigating. Accessibility isn't exclusively about us being helped – it's also about us helping when we need to or want to. I want to watch a film with my wife and have her understand what the people on the screen are saying or what I'm hearing in the sound effects.

This goes well beyond accessibility in film. Captions and audio description are just as important as a ramp into the supermarket. A script written so that the deaf/blind can experience a film is a true commitment to accessibility. That Netflix provides that for our film should be an indication and inspiration to others to look at accessibility as an important part of their film and not something that's nice to do or that one has to do. When you want to do something versus when you feel like you HAVE to do it, (in my experience) it makes the task so much easier. And we all could use an easier world right now.”

Jim LeBrecht, Co-Director of *Crip Camp*

Like all filmmakers, the *Crip Camp* team made discoveries about that best practice while working on the film, and they learned with and from the community at the heart of the narrative, going on to produce audio description and captioning that conjured a rich and full storytelling world for **all audiences** and undoubtedly contributing to the film's acclaim.

Co-Director Nicole Newnham: "When we were working on *Crip Camp* one of the things that was really important to us was to do test screenings for folks in the disability community. And Jim was really proactive early on in our process in saying, let's put line items in our budget to make sure that we are actually audio describing and captioning versions of rough cuts, so we can have rough cut screenings that are accessible. So, once we did send out for a quick audio description version for a rough-cut screening for a group of diverse folks from the disability community in Berkeley. We did not have the opportunity to check it before we played it."

In the speedily-produced audio described version of the film, the describer used a derogatory phrase to describe a camper on-screen during a baseball game.

Co-Director Jim LeBrecht: "When that section played there was a gasp from the room, because the words that they used for somebody using a wheelchair were 'wheelchair-bound'. And that is an offensive term in the disabled community. I'm not bound by my wheelchair. I don't sleep in my wheelchair. I am not entrapped in my wheelchair. My wheelchair is my freedom machine. So this experience was really enlightening to us. This is a representation of your film; people are going to see and hear this, and you don't want to just send it off to a factory."

The *Crip Camp* team discovered how important it is to be directly involved as creatives in the making of accessible deliverables, and now consider it as significant a component of the film as the edit. They worked closely with captioning and AD teams with Netflix's support, and together they infused the scripts for these deliverables with the spirit and ethos of the film, and with artistic flair in how they described picture and sound.

"We filmmakers pour so much blood, sweat and tears into our films; we care about every cut. Why would we ever want to have an experience where a whole group of people is watching our film and they are experiencing it in a way that we have not put that same kind of love and care into?"

Nicole Newnham, Co-Director of *Crip Camp*

Accessibility immersion, experience and experimentation

Another significant creative opportunity for filmmakers when making accessible deliverables is immersion in the imaginative process of interrogating how other people engage with sound and visuals; surely one of the principal concerns of cinema. As Roger Ebert famously stated, "The movies are like a machine that generates empathy."

Artist and TED Fellow Christine Sun Kim made [a short film](#) about the creative potential for closed captioning, and it offers a window into how

she experiences screen storytelling as a Deaf woman.



Image Description: Christine Sun Kim, an Asian American artist with dark-blue hair and glasses, holds her hand out flat towards us. Below her, subtitles read 'Let me show you'.

"I think a lot about closed captions. Those little lines of text below me right now. As a non-hearing person, I rely on them. And here's a not-so-well-kept secret about closed captions: **they suck**. Captioning dialogue is one thing. But captioning sound is another. For example, if music starts to play the captions might go something like:

[music]

One. Word. If I'm lucky, maybe I'll get:

[violin music]

Which is... better, but still not enough. It doesn't tell me anything about **what the sound is made of. How it moves. Its personality**. The more description, the better. So for instance:

[mournful violin music]

Or:

[Mournful violin music that sounds like crying alone in an empty bar]

Or better yet:

[Mournful violin music that sounds like crying alone in an empty bar]

[in 1920s Paris.]

[You're wearing a very tiny but fashionable hat that you tip]

[to the bartender as you order a fourth martini.]

[Music stops]

That tells me something. I place a lot of **trust** in the people who write captions. But those people have a different relationship with sound and the world than I do." ²³

We recommend **seeking out and experiencing** a range of films that have done captioning and audio description particularly well, including *Crip Camp*, Rodney Evans' *Vision Portraits* (2019), Peter Middleton and James Spinney's *Notes On Blindness* (2016), and *Amanda Knox* directed by Rod Blackhurst and Brian McGinn (2016).

Have you ever watched a film with audio description? Play the audio described version of some films, **play** the captioned versions too, and **immerse yourself in this form of creative storytelling** with your collaborators from pre-production onwards.

As we've already mentioned, **over 50% of the revenue** obtained by most current films comes from translated (dubbed, subtitled) and accessible versions (captioned for the D/deaf, audio described for the blind and low vision).²⁴ So, the quality of these accessible versions is a significant factor in the economic and creative success of a film. The creation of high-quality audio description and captions for all films should be seen as a critical component of media development for majority audiences, rather than a post-production element for a niche audience.

Accessibility as an extension of creative storytelling

When considering the wider benefits of making film content more accessible, consider these thought-provocations about your creative vision:

- How might you **develop your visual narrative** when you know your gorgeous images are going to be **described verbally** for blind and low-vision audiences? What do you as a director want to call attention to in each frame and scene of your film – is it, for example, the production design, costuming, lighting, or body language of the people on screen? Are there words or phrases that establish the **visual world** of each location, character, or the overall aesthetic space of your film? Do certain words repeat as indications of emotional tone in the way that colours may communicate tone visually?
- How might you frame differently if you know that there will be captions on the screen that represent your film's **voices and music**? Could the use of text provide you (or your characters or contributors) with **an additional layer of communication**, and what could that do for your **storytelling**? How would you describe the **emotions** that your **music** is intended to convey?
- How might you use captions to convey characters' **personalities** or **perspectives**? (See Rob Savage's award-winning short *Dawn of the Deaf*.)

- How will you convey the **sonic atmosphere(s)** of the film in the captions so that the specificities of sound design and music, including all of the audible tones and undertones of the story, are also expressed visually in the captions?
- How will you visually articulate the **relationship** or distinction between captions and other on-screen text such as credits, informational cards, or lower thirds?
- How much of your narrative unfolds in **images** vs **dialogue**, and how much of that is what you intend? How does thinking about the creative possibilities of access features help you understand your own sensory relationship to cinema?
- How could thinking about potential **alternative sensory routes** into your film help you develop your **narrative** and **audio/visual** goals and **intentions**? For example, if your protagonist walks into a kitchen, the audio description could make audience members' mouths water with aromas rather than stating matter-of-factly that something is cooking. And should the taste of any given on-screen kiss be described as salty, sugary? Considering **sensory questions** with your key creative team throughout the process can clarify and hone your approach to shooting and editing, as well as audio description, yielding a more **entertaining sensory experience** for all viewers.
- How will you determine the **criteria** for **casting** the audio description narrator that adds to the overall aesthetic and representational experience of your film? What **cultural considerations** are important for your film and your values, and how are you considering **race, sex, gender, disability and/or age** in this part of your storytelling? You might also consider whether the ideal voice is deep or higher pitched, whether it sounds mature or youthful, if a person with a specific **accent** would be culturally appropriate, or whether the voice stands out from the primary voices in the film's on-screen dialogue.

Leading practice for making accessible deliverables

"Accessibility can no longer be considered as a specific problem of people with disabilities [but of] society at large."²⁵

The provision of access features like captions and audio description has historically been connected to disability. However, there is a strong movement towards a **wider, more universalist** view of media and film accessibility. To better reflect this broader perspective, an underlying **philosophy of accessibility** should be ingrained into our film efforts (NB: 'efforts', because it is about more than just a film itself). Below are four areas of **excellence** we can incorporate into our practice.



Image Description: Jim LeBrecht, a white man with curly hair, glasses and a goatee beard, sits smiling in a power chair in front of a sound mixing console with multiple computer screens. His t-shirt is bright red and the text on it reads "The future is accessible".

1) Technical considerations for accessible filmmaking

While filmmakers often have questions about technical specifications, terminology and delivery materials in relation to accessible filmmaking, these answers can be found easily online and from exhibitors, broadcasters and post-production houses (and several are mentioned in this document). For example, Netflix provides extensive information about the technical requirements for delivering [subtitles, captions](#) and [audio description](#), and these formed part of the *Crip Camp* producers' **deliverables checklists** on the film's journey to accessibility.

2) Fundamental considerations for accessible filmmaking

In addition to understanding technical details such as 'how many characters-per-line' in captions or the relative volume of audio description, there are fundamental considerations for filmmaking overall that should be a part of our overarching processes. This is the '**philosophy of accessibility**':

- Include audio description and captioning as a **standard part** of every filmmaking process, not a one-off nor **limited** to films about D/deafness or disability.



Image Description: In a darkly-lit home filmmaker Holly Hardman, a white woman with long silver hair, stands next to her film participant Geri Burns, a white woman with red hair. They're looking intently at a table full of photographs while behind them J Weintraub, a young Asian man, films them with a camera on his shoulder.

- **Budget** and **schedule early** for making high-quality captions and audio description, on final deliverables and also rough cuts, trailers and screeners. This means ensuring that filmmakers spend time crafting the scripts with the captioners and audio describers; these scripts are every bit as important to the creative process as the film script that captures what hearing and non-blind audiences experience.
- Plan to create them from the outset and this will enable you to **respect them as a core part** of the filmmaking process, prevent them being a **stressful add-on** at the end of post-production, ultimately **save you time and money** (e.g. multiple parties won't have to produce them in a rush during distribution) and will enable you to engage with **wider audiences and greater sources of revenue**.
- Remember that **culturally sensitive** captioning and audio description that conveys your values and intentions – and doesn't introduce racist, sexist, ableist or homophobic perspective to your work – is key to the role of filmmaker.
- Ensure that as a filmmaker you are part of **creating** the accessible deliverables – get in the studio with your captioners and audio describers and complete your storytelling. Captioning and audio description are part of the **art of storytelling** and the **language of your film** (including representation), and shouldn't be left to someone who doesn't make editorial decisions. [The Accessible Filmmaking Guide](#) details the practical step-by-step process and **costs** of working with captioners and audio describers.
- Don't wait until you're in distribution – at this point, there is **no creative control** and you lose involvement in a crucial editorial facet of your work.
- Remember to budget and schedule for accessibility features on **trailers, rough cuts, test screening cuts, festival screeners** and **awards screeners**. Without these, you are excluding potential D/deaf and disabled colleagues across the industry – including awards voters – from engaging with you and your film.
- Request (contractually where possible) that your distributors and exhibitors (including festivals) **hold screenings that actually use the accessibility features** you've provided. **Advertise** those screenings and D/deaf / disabled audiences will come.

3) Hosting in-person accessible events (screenings, Q&As, panels, parties, awards, markets)

Filmmaking doesn't end with the creation of a film; its life continues when the film meets the world.

- **Planning** for in-person events is key. This includes everything from basic audience development, engaging with advisory groups, transport and planning the event space itself. Within this **marketing** will also play a key role in order to ensure that you are reaching people, through engaging with various D/deaf and disabled perspectives including critics, and also offering free and discounted tickets when you're able to.
- **Effective delivery processes** will ensure the success of in-person events/screenings. Ensure venues are accessible, captions and audio headsets for audio descriptions are working, British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters are present for Q&As, accessible toilets are available and trained staff or volunteers are present to assist where needed.
- **Seek feedback** after events, to evaluate what worked and what didn't. This doesn't always have to be done in a formal setting – even engaging quickly with your audience after events is an opportunity to help you evaluate its effectiveness.
- It's as important that D/deaf and disabled filmmakers **can access parties, drinks and networking events** as it is for screenings or formal meetings; much of the business and pleasure of film is done in these **informal social environments**.



Image Description: A group of disabled artists are gathered in a huddle, smiling, at the International Documentary Association's 'Getting Real' conference: Cheryl Green, Victor Pineda, Jason DaSilva, Lawrence Carter-Long, Day Al-Mohamed with her black Labrador guide dog, and Jim LeBrecht.



Image Description: Producer Lindsey Dryden stands next to director and producer Jennifer Brea, a mixed-heritage woman in her early 30s sitting in a wheelchair. Behind them is an orange press backdrop that says 'Sheffield Doc Fest'.

- Invite D/deaf and disabled talent to take part in talks, panels and events to **discuss something other than disability**. We're in the film industry because we're talented storytellers, and it's that talent that deserves a spotlight. Don't just wheel us out to talk about access, representation or equity.
- **Ensure access to the stage** as well as to the audience seating area. Award-winning filmmakers should be able to get to the **stage** to receive their accolades! Venues frequently consider themselves accessible if wheelchair users can sit at the back of the room, and have never considered that disabled people might be **talent** who need to get on to the stage at the front. **If a non-disabled person can do it at your event, then a disabled person should be able to do it too.**

We recommend the UK's [Inclusive Cinema](#) project (developed by the BFI Film Audience Network aka FAN), which is designed to support screen exhibitors in championing diversity on screen, in the audience and behind the camera. The website contains accessibility service provider recommendations, how-to guides, research and data, case studies and information on training and funding.



Image Description: On a stage, Jim LeBrecht speaks into a microphone while Nicole Newnham stands beside him smiling. Behind them an enormous screen in pink with black lettering reads 'US Documentary Audience Award'.

4) Hosting online accessible events (screenings, Q&As, panels, parties, awards, markets)

The global pandemic has changed the way we work and network. In some cases, this has allowed D/deaf and disabled people more access than ever before to events that were previously inaccessible. Many D/deaf and disabled people **don't want to return to the 'normal' of pre-pandemic times**, in which we were **excluded** from attending much in-person activity. That said, online events are **not automatically more accessible**; here are the key steps to ensure that everyone can participate.

- **Communications.** Ensure that all of your comms (email, registration forms, websites, announcements, marketing) include a **prominent notice** that accommodations are available, and instructions on how to request them. For many, this may be their first contact with you and it is a signal as to whether or not they are welcome in your space.
- **Accommodation requests.** **Proactively ask** your invitees and attendees about accessibility and diversity so you can offer **accommodations** and resources that welcome everyone. It lessens the burden on those without privilege when you use your privilege to lift up others.
- **Respecting time and expertise.** Include an honorarium in your budget to pay all panellists and moderators – even a modest payment to recognise their expertise.



Image Description: A video call with four people: Jenni Gold, a white woman with shoulder-length blonde hair sits in a wheelchair in a home cinema. An American Sign Language ASL interpreter is mid-sign. Jim LeBrecht is wearing a blue floral shirt. Kaitlyn Yang, an Asian-American woman with long dark hair. The caption on-screen reads 'And they talk to each other about something other'.

- **Budget.** Include line items in your **budgets** for captioning and BSL interpreting. Keep in mind that you may need additional funding if it is necessary to select a more accessible location for events. If this is part of your event planning from the beginning it is less of a strain later.
- **Captioning and sign language interpreters.** Provide **both** live captioning and **sign language interpreters** for all events whenever possible, but if you need to start with one option we recommend live captioning (as not all D/deaf people are sign language users). While we recognise the increasing usage of **automatic live captioning** services, we do not currently recommend them, as they're frequently inaccurate.
 - **Captioning.** Live captioning is affordable, and creating captions afterwards for a recording of a panel are pennies per minute. Providing this by **default** for **all** of your online events (not just those for or about D/deaf and disabled people) not only increases accessibility for individuals who are D/deaf, but may also be helpful for international participants or those that need their speakers to be turned off in their household environment. In addition, **not all participants have visible disabilities, nor are comfortable disclosing.** NB: Live captioning services are sometimes called Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART).
 - **Sign language interpreters.** Provide BSL in the UK. Provide **advance information** about who will talk and any key terms, for interpreters and captioners.
 - **Testing.** When you do a technical run-through, **include** interpreting and captioning as part of your **test run**. Regardless of the platform or system you use, at a minimum please be sure to 'test' (both live captioners and/or automated) **with sound off** to ensure that what is being typed is actually meaningful communication. Make sure your interpreter is **easy to see** and their signing clearly visible.
 - **Accessing accommodations.** During the event, **explain** how individuals may **access** captions and interpreters within the platform you're using. If you aren't sure, check in advance with your captioning service and interpreters (many are well-versed and can talk you through it).
 - Ensure you **display captions** in any video materials shown during webinars, panels, and/or screenings, including **trailers**.

- **Informal industry events.** Accessibility isn't just for panels or webinars – it is also for informal (and crucial) industry social events and networking and the development of meaningful, substantive professional relationships that advance careers. Please ensure you have secured an accessible location and provide live captioning and/or BSL interpreters for the **social and networking** elements of your online events.
- **Introductions.** If you're participating in an online event:
 - During introductions, when giving your **bio/intro**, provide your **pronouns** (if comfortable), a **land acknowledgement** when appropriate, and a short image description of yourself and background for blind and low-vision participants. Encourage fellow panellists to do the same. An example image description might be:

"My name is _____ and my pronouns are she/her/they/them/he/him. I am a Black woman with shoulder-length, curly brown hair that is shaved on both sides. I'm wearing a green shirt, red glasses and I am sitting in a room with plants and artwork behind me."



Image Description: A video call with four people: Kyla Harris, a mixed-heritage woman in her mid-30s with dark hair in a bun. Jim LeBrecht wearing a red t-shirt that matches his background, Nicole Newnham wearing a polka-dot top and Judy Heumann, a woman in her 70s who holds up a phone to the computer camera as she smiles.

How to make the filmmaking process more accessible for team members

“We live in a time where politics live downstream from culture, and when people can't see themselves represented in the culture, they can't reasonably believe what's possible for their lives. And maybe more importantly, when other people who are not part of their communities don't see those people in the culture, they underestimate them too, which I think is critical, especially right now. ... As an audience member, I want to see a rich, fully representative inclusive culture, just so I can see better movies, to say nothing of the politics of it. Our culture should represent our lives and if it fails to, we all lose.

– Franklin Leonard, Founder, *The Black List*²⁶

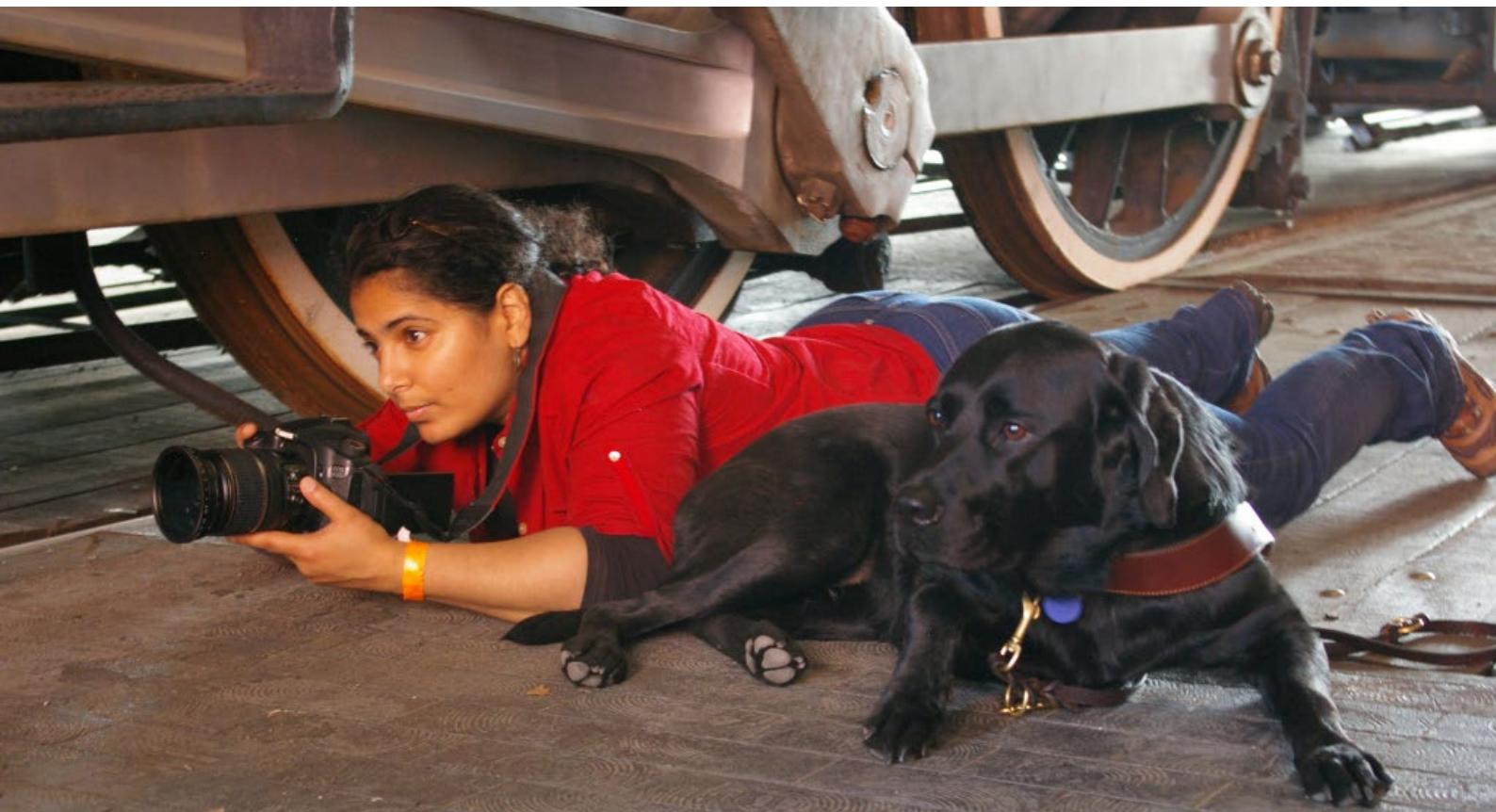


Image Description: Day Al-Mohamed, a woman of colour in her 20s, lies stomach-down on the floor to get just the right angle for her camera shot. Beside her is her black Labrador guide dog, and behind them are the wheels of a massive steam train.

According to the 2012 Creative Skillset employment census, **only 0.3% of the total film workforce are disabled** (0.2% in production, 0.1% in exhibition and none in distribution). This is a staggering under-representation of D/deaf and disabled people in filmmaking when disabled people make up over 20% of the UK population.

It is critical that the film industry takes urgent, concrete steps to include D/deaf and disabled people in filmmaking at every level, not least because the participation of people with disabilities in the media has been suggested as a path to dismantling the prejudice of **ableism**.

"Ableism, defined as discrimination or oppression based on one's disability or perceived disability, pervades our culture. Fear of disability, misconceptions, and stereotypes about disabled people are so common that most people don't even notice them. Popular movies and television shows perpetuate ableism in ways that go unnoticed by mainstream society and even movie critics."²⁷

"Accuracy in portrayals is extremely important to disabled viewers; the industry recognises that disability, as a political concern, is not yet as advanced as others issues such as ethnicity or gender equality, and that senior management must be at the helm of any initiative to effect change. It is crucial that disabled people need to be at the heart of the creative process to move things forward."²⁸

"We need to be asking: who is not at the table, and why not, and actively reach out to incorporate and complicate our analyses if we ever hope to represent the diversity of the human condition, and the complexities of ableism when experienced by those who are also confronted by homophobia, racism, and the particularities of different disabilities as well."

Dr Michelle Nario-Redmond, Professor of Psychology and Biomedical Humanities²⁹

Collaboration

"Crip Camp was built on trust: between us and the editors, and really virtually everybody on the film. It was a safe space and when you do that, and you have a collaboration like we've been privileged to have with each other – you feel like you can kind of reach for the stars and **you're going to be OK."**

Jim LeBrecht, Co-Director of *Crip Camp*



Image Description: Jim LeBrecht sits in front of a large camera, surrounded by a light, mic stand above him and two screens attached to the camera, which show a shot of Jim. He is being filmed on location in a home with yellow walls, and windows with white curtains that let daylight in.

We asked D/deaf and disabled filmmakers from FWD-Doc, Press Reset and beyond to highlight their priority advice for including and collaborating with D/deaf and disabled talent:

"Start engaging with D/deaf and disabled expertise **as early as possible**, ideally in development; trying to 'bolt-on' D/deaf and disabled nuance and expertise at the end of an essentially ableist film production rarely works well."

– Producer

"Establish the **needs of all the people** on the project, not just the people with a disability. Understanding needs for childcare, working patterns, etc. benefits everyone – the best thing is to create an open discussion on how best to **facilitate everyone's needs** (which also avoids singling out the person with the disability)." – Writer/Director

"Talk with us! Contact one of the disabled-led film talent organisations like FWD-Doc when you're looking for collaborators, talent and projects to commission, and **engage thoughtfully and non-defensively with a range of perspectives throughout the entire filmmaking process**. Budget to do that during development, production, post and distribution (and your film will reap the economic benefits!). Really listen to our perspectives and expertise. Nothing about us without us. Be open-minded, respectful and talk with D/deaf and disabled people about what we need to be able to collaborate with you."

– Producer & Director



Image Description: Filmmaker Kyla Harris, her hair up in a bun, headphones on, sits in her power-chair, jubilant as she directs the next shot. Beside her is a camera on a tripod, between a large fill light and a key light.

"Work with Access Statements or 'Access Riders', which are documents that outline what we need to do our work, so those needs can be facilitated and we have equal access to work. Make these documents for everyone in your team, not just disabled people, and budget and schedule to allow for flexibility based on everyone's needs. It benefits everyone when we create equitable and sustainable work practices." – Writer & Actor

"Any time you ask for advice/lived experience, then you should be paying for it. We need to move away from the legacy of disabled artists/filmmakers/advisors not being paid appropriately. Offering an honorarium is better than not offering anything at all."

– Writer/Director

"Work with D/deaf and disabled-led artists and service providers. We're usually the experts in what we need and how to make it happen as affordably as possible. And we'll probably help you avoid costly and potentially embarrassing access experiments (like using unreliable and wobbly handheld devices to deliver captions to D/deaf audiences) because we've already tried them, and we've probably already made – and continue to make – those mistakes ourselves. Doing accessibility well in film is an ongoing dialogue. As long as there's an acknowledgement that this is work and that pretty soon we won't have to do this labour for non-disabled people anymore because they'll all be doing it already, then we're usually happy to advise (particularly if this is paid advisory, even with just a modest honorarium.") – Producer & Director

"Pay D/deaf and disabled talent appropriately. The Disability Pay Gap currently stands at 19.6%. (Non-disabled workers earnt 19.6% more per hour than disabled workers in 2020)" – Producer

"If you're telling a story about D/deafness or disability and there's no one on your team who has lived experience and also has creative influence and the power to make editorial decisions then you have a problem. Disabled narratives cannot be told without having anyone with a disability on the project, neither can it be tokenistic or toothless – alarm bells should be ringing if this is the case! And disabled junior members of a team shouldn't be tasked with standing up for their own representation among a non-disabled senior team." – Writer/Director



Image Description: On the set of a film, director Rodney Evans, a man of colour in his 30s, is leaning against a reflective surface and assuredly holding a camera while pensively looking down.

"Use the word 'disability'! We use it with pride. Please don't dance around it (with euphemisms like 'differently abled', 'handicapable'). Look up the #SayTheWord campaign. Look at Disability Twitter and see who we are. We're out here being open and clear about how to engage with us." – Director

"Especially in documentary storytelling about loss (e.g. of senses, independence etc) or illness, and especially if the main editorial decision-maker is the person actually having the personal experience of illness or disability, ensure they're not the only person on the team with that experience. This individual does not magically know all about the nuance of D/deaf and disabled lives, and can't be solely responsible for that representation. It's an unfair assumption from the rest of the team, puts unhelpful pressure on them, and frequently results in a film that can only engage with a tragedy narrative, and is harmful to and rejected by D/deaf and disabled audiences." – Producer/Director

"If you're going to bring on board people with lived experience of your film subject, think about what the impact of working with you might be for them on a personal level. This applies to any marginalised community. For disabled people, confronting non-disabled people's ableism and assumptions, even when in a positive and collaborative environment, can be very affecting. Offering mental health resources, like those provided by Film In Mind, can turn a potentially painful process into a professional and supportive experience." – Producer & Director

"If someone with the lived experiences portrayed in the film is not in a leadership position in the filmmaking team, there is a serious power issue." – Director

"Prioritise disabled stories by disabled people that do not perpetuate the tired and damaging stereotypes that are so commonplace."
– Writer, Director, Actor

"Employ disabled people at the highest level of every organisation."
– Director

"Commission and fund disabled filmmakers. Show our films."
– Director



Image Description: Kyla Harris looks serious in front of the camera, with a bright yellow colorama taped to the ceiling behind her and a boom above her. Lou Macnamara, a white woman with bleached blonde hair in plaits in a white t-shirt and navy trousers, is adjusting the camera lens.

"Creating a talent **pipeline** for paid work is essential – offering endless 'mentoring' doesn't effectively convert talent into paid jobs and sustainable careers." – Director

"Do the **work of understanding ableism** – there are numerous resources already out there, including [Disability Arts Online](#), and a passionate D/deaf and disabled community on social media (e.g. #DisabilityTwitter and #WeShallNotBeRemoved, a UK disability arts alliance) which has already done the work of creating resources and sharing their expertise and concerns. Read books such as *Disability Visibility* by Alice Wong, *Pleasure Activism* by Adrienne Maree Brown, *Crippled* by Frances Ryan, and *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha." – Actor, Director & Curator

"When you're hiring and you can't find an experienced disabled person for a role, **pair established non-disabled talent with disabled talent** for mutual (paid) learning and to develop disabled experience. That way, next time you want to hire a disabled person in a particular role, there will be someone with the experience to do it. The Netflix feature documentary *Disclosure* pioneered a [paid fellowship programme to develop transgender talent](#) - this can inform and inspire the entire film industry. We can all learn to proactively budget and schedule to do this." – Producer, Writer, Director

"Support films that are about or made by people with disabilities, even if the central theme of the film has nothing to do with disability."

– Writer, Director, Actor



Image Description: Jim LeBrecht, in tie-dye shirt and tinted glasses, sits in his wheelchair on the abandoned muddy grounds of what was once Camp Jened. A large yellow digger looms behind him. He reminisces with Denise Sherer Jacobson who looks back at Jim intently.

"Be courageous enough to engage with D/deaf and disabled people who are vociferously demanding better representation – parts of the community are loud after decades of misrepresentation and harm. Make space for engaging with those perspectives in your work processes. And **recognise that the 'community' is not homogenous.**" – Writer

"Businesses and film entities need to realise that D/deaf and disabled communities are underserved, niche audiences that are pretty **organised, reachable**, and easily **convertible**. Businesses and film entities' practices of ignoring the existence of D/deaf and disabled people results in the loss of massive audiences and revenue. You can hire D/deaf and disabled people who can help you seize these opportunities." – Producer

"Disability is multi-faceted and not always visible. People with different disabilities are also learning about people with other disabilities; we can also be guilty of not always understanding each other's realities and needs. If you are someone who wants to tell the story of someone with a disability and you yourself do not share that disability, involve those who do have that disability in the storytelling, including having creative input and compensation." – Writer, Director, Actor

"Just because someone identifies with a diagnosis or particular deaf or disability experience does not mean they all agree; involve a range of perspectives so you're not involving people just as a token. There are political, social, and many other differences of opinion and action." – Filmmaker

"You are not always the best person to make a film about someone else, no matter how much you love the person or the topic. Be prepared to hand over your access to resources if you are unable to meet the needs of the people in the film and the audience. The documentary field needs to engage with its historic ethos of entitlement and paternalism." – Writer, Director, Actor

"Ensure that, if you are looking at issues of racial equity in who tells stories you support, that you apply the same attention to films about disability and people with disabilities. Explicitly include disability and people with disabilities in your mission statements, alongside your commitments to other marginalised identities." – Producer & Director

"Be an ally and an advocate. Meet new D/deaf and disabled people, connect and amplify talent. Create connections and challenge people if you feel something is missing or lacking." – Producer

"Include POC, LGBTQ+, and filmmakers with disabilities in programming **beyond diversity**; ensure you're providing a platform to discuss talent, not just identity. We are all filmmakers with a wide variety of expertise and have value and skills beyond our identities." – Producer

"You are creating the model for your team/members/participants. Prioritise and promote accessibility. Fund it. Talk about it. Not only does this encourage more people to be open about their disabilities and accommodation needs but it also encourages others to craft accessible content and engage in creating a welcoming and inclusive environment." – Writer, Director, Actor

"Non-disabled allies are essential in joining us in campaigning for our rights within the film industry. Often, all we want to do is to be able to focus on our craft like our non-disabled industry professionals, but so much of the bureaucracy and ableism within the industry stops us from not only creating but joining the industry altogether." – Actor, Writer, Activist

"Share this document with everyone across your film team – from production managers to editors, to execs to runners. It's everyone's job to understand and engage with a multiplicity of identities and experiences in filmmaking, and recognise that disabilities can be invisible." – Producer



Image Description: Jim LeBrecht sits in his wheelchair centre-stage. He holds a microphone in his right hand and his left hand is raised in a fist above his head, triumphant. Standing next to him, applauding, is Nicole Newnham. The screen behind them is a rich purple with large black abstract patterns.

Glossary & Useful Terms

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Ableism | Ableism is a system that places value on people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence, excellence and productivity. |
| Accessibility | Accessibility can be defined as the "ability to access" the functionality, and possible benefit, of some system or entity and is used to describe the degree to which a product such as a device, service, environment is accessible by as many people as possible. The concept of accessible design ensures both "direct access" (i.e. unassisted) and "indirect access" meaning compatibility with a person's assistive technology (for example, computer screen readers). |
| Audio Description | Audio description (AD) is a mode of media accessibility that turns visual elements into a verbal text to provide access for the blind and partially sighted audiences. |
| Captions vs. Subtitles | Captions are designed for viewers who cannot hear the audio in the video. Subtitles are designed for viewers who can hear but do not understand the language in the video. |
| Closed Captions | Closed Captions are the most common type of captions used by major broadcasters and video streaming services. Usually identified by a [CC] symbol in the corner of the screen, closed captions exist as a separate file, which gives the viewer the ability to switch them on or off. |
| Crip | Using the terms "crip" and "cripping" is one way of "taking back" language and power from people, institutions and systems that have used it historically (and, in some cases, presently) to harm and demean disabled people, including certain at times "crippling" physical disabilities. Language, control, and social power are thus asserted by disabled people and our allies, who have the right to speak for ourselves and act on our own behalf. |
| "Crippling Up" | 'Crippling up,' traditionally is when a non-disabled actor takes on the role of a disabled character and their portrayal often involves mimicking the physical characteristics of a specific disability or condition. The term can also be expanded to mean that the story doesn't engage with the lived experience of disability. |
| D/deaf | The "uppercase D" Deaf is used to describe people who identify as culturally Deaf. The "lowercase d" deaf simply refers to the physical condition of being deaf or hard of hearing. |
| Disability Justice | Disability Justice centralises on the needs and experiences of folks experiencing intersectional oppression, such as disabled people of colour, immigrants with disabilities, queers with disabilities, trans and gender non-conforming people with disabilities, people with disabilities who are houseless, people with disabilities who are incarcerated, people with disabilities who have had their ancestral lands stolen, amongst others. |

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Employment Gap | The disability employment gap is the difference between the employment rates of disabled and non-disabled people. |
| Intersectionality | Coined by Professor Kimberley Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality is the concept that all oppression is linked and acknowledges that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression and we must consider everything and anything that can marginalise people – gender, race, disability, class, sexual orientation etc. |
| Inspiration Porn | Inspiration Porn is an informal term, coined by the late Australian disability activist Stella Young, for a loose genre of media depictions of disabled people. It is the portrayal of people with disabilities as inspiring on the basis of their disability. |
| Medical Model of Disability | The medical model of disability, arose from the biomedical perception of disability. It links disability diagnosis to an individual's physical body, supposing that this disability may reduce the individual's quality of life and the aim is, with medical intervention, this disability will be diminished or corrected. |
| "Nothing About Us Without Us" | "Nothing About Us Without Us!" is a slogan used to communicate the idea that no policy should be decided by any representative without the full and direct participation of members of the group(s) affected by that policy. This involves national, ethnic, disability-based, or other groups that are often thought to be marginalized from political, social, and economic opportunities. |
| Open Captions | Open captions are permanently visible, or 'burnt' onto the video or stream meaning that the viewer does not need to switch anything on to access them. |
| Pay Gap | The disability pay gap is the difference between the median hourly pay of disabled and non-disabled people. |
| Representation in Media | The basic definition of representation in the media is simply how media, such as television, film and books, portray certain types of people or communities. Groups that have been underrepresented in media include women, people of colour, D/deaf and disabled people, LBGTQA+ people, people with a range of body shapes and types, and people of non-Christian religions. |
| Social Model of Disability | The social model of disability is a way of viewing the world, developed by disabled people. The model says that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference. The social model helps us recognise barriers that make life harder for disabled people. |

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Further Reading

Books

- *Being Heumann: An Unrepentant Memoir of a Disability Rights Activist* by Judith Heumann and Kristen Joiner
- *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha
- *Crippled: Austerity and the Demonization of Disabled People* by Frances Ryan
- *Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century* by Alice Wong
- *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* by Adrienne Maree Brown
- *Sitting Pretty: The View From My Ordinary Resilient Disabled Body* by Rebekah Taussig
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Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution Credits

CRIP CAMP

A DISABILITY REVOLUTION

Directors

Nicole Newnham

Jim LeBrecht

Edited By

Eileen Meyer

Andrew Gersh

Music By

Bear McCreary

Executive Producers

President Barack Obama

Michelle Obama

Tonia Davis

Priya Swaminathan

Howard Gertler

Co-Editor

Mary Lampson

Music Supervisor

Amine Ramer

Director of Photography

Justin Schein

Additional Editor

Shane Hofeldt

Associate Producer

Story Consultant

Denise Sherer Jacobson

Produced By

Sara Bolder

Jim LeBrecht

Nicole Newnham

Lauren Schwartzman

Impact Producer

Andraéa LaVant

Acknowledgements

This toolkit was created with insight and expertise from D/deaf and disabled filmmakers in the UK and USA. Special thanks go to members of FWD-Doc and the BFI Press Reset Campaign, to Toki Allison, Cheryl Green and David Proud, and to Higher Ground Productions, Andraéa LaVant, Netflix and WDW.

FWD-Doc writing team: Lindsey Dryden, Samantha Steele, Day Al-Mohamed, Kyla Harris, Alysa Nahmias, and Emrys Mordin. Proofreading: Jo Johnston. Graphic design: Rafaela Spangenthal.

FWD-Doc

[FWD-Doc](#) is a group of filmmakers with disabilities (FWDs) working in documentary film — and our active allies. We believe that coming together as a community allows us to support each other and

advocate for ourselves with greater power. Led by founding members Day Al-Mohamed, Lindsey Dryden, Jim LeBrecht and Alysa Nahmias, FWD-Doc seeks to increase the visibility of, support for, and direct access to opportunities, networks, and employment for D/deaf and disabled filmmakers. We aim to foster greater inclusion of D/deafness and disability within the broader entertainment industry. FWD-Doc is a non-profit organisation supported by Frances and Jen Rainin, Field of Vision and individual donors, and [fiscally sponsored by CID](#). To find out more or to get in touch with us, please visit <https://www.fwd-doc.org/>.



[Doc Society](#) is a non-profit founded in 2005 committed to enabling great documentary films and connecting them to audiences globally. Based in London and New York we work with filmmakers

and partners all over the world. We bring people together to unleash the transformational power of independent documentary film. We serve individual filmmakers and the growing network of partners who support them globally. We help build new models, aiming to innovate, share freely and innovate again. A commitment to anti-racism, economic & climate justice is embedded in and informs all we do.

Special thanks go to Jessica Edwards, Director of Impact & Partnerships and Shanida Scotland, Head of Film.



[Little by Little Films](#) is a UK- and US-based independent production company dedicated to brilliant storytelling by and about under-represented voices and founded by Emmy®-winning producer and director Lindsey Dryden.

With a focus on the perspectives of women, LGBTQ+ folks, and D/deaf and disabled people, LBL Films is committed to making films with artistry and originality, and delivering impactful and authentic campaigns.