



Dementia Friendly Arts, Culture and Entertainment Venues



Arts, culture and entertainment venues play an important role in helping people living with dementia remain engaged, connected and active in community life—and to continue expressing themselves, engaging with others and finding meaning through arts and cultural experiences. This sector includes museums, theaters, galleries, concert venues, performing arts centers, cultural institutions, festivals and historical sites.

This Dementia Friendly America Sector Guide outlines practical actions that arts and cultural organizations can take to build awareness, communicate clearly, create supportive environments and offer programs that make participation easier and more enjoyable for people living with dementia and their care partners.

UNDERSTANDING DEMENTIA

Dementia is a term used to describe a group of symptoms affecting memory, thinking, communication and decision-making that are serious enough to affect daily life. It is not a normal part of aging. Common symptoms include memory loss, confusion, trouble finding words, difficulty planning or solving problems and changes in mood or behavior. Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia. Other types include Vascular Dementia, Lewy Body Dementia and Frontotemporal Dementia.

In arts and cultural settings, dementia may make it harder to navigate spaces, follow programs or interpret information. Sensory stimulation and unfamiliar environments may also contribute to confusion or overwhelm.

BUILD DEMENTIA AWARENESS

Provide dementia-awareness training for all staff and volunteers through programs such as Dementia Friends or invite local experts to lead educational sessions or workshops. Integrate this awareness into staff and volunteer onboarding, ongoing training and daily visitor interactions.

Help staff understand how dementia may affect the visitor experience in arts and cultural settings by sharing practical examples, such as difficulty navigating large venues, following exhibit information, locating seats or managing busy, noisy environments.

Prepare staff to recognize common situations—such as a visitor appearing lost, asking repeated questions, missing cues during a program or becoming overwhelmed—and to respond with calm, supportive assistance.

Support employees who are providing care to someone with dementia by offering flexible scheduling, access to employee assistance programs or referrals to resources like the Eldercare Locator and the Alzheimer's Association Helpline.

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND RESPECTFULLY

Engage the person before speaking. Make eye contact, face the person directly and use a friendly greeting so they know you are speaking to them.

Speak slowly and clearly. Use short, simple sentences with one idea at a time.

Use a warm, calm and respectful tone of voice. Friendly expressions and reassurance help visitors feel safe and supported.

Ask one question at a time. Offer simple choices, such as “Would you like to sit here or near the front?”

Give the person extra time to respond. Pause and wait patiently—avoid rushing or finishing sentences.

Repeat or rephrase if something is not understood. Use simple words or shorter phrases to support understanding.

Reduce distractions when possible. Move to a quieter area or pause conversation during busy or noisy moments.

Pay attention to non-verbal cues. Watch for signs of confusion, stress or frustration and respond calmly and supportively.

Use visual cues to support understanding. Point to programs, signage, seating areas or exhibits to reinforce verbal communication.

IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Make it easy to find your way. Use clear, large-print signs with simple words and icons for entrances, restrooms, ticketing and seating. In museums and cultural sites, include simple maps or “You Are Here” signage. In theaters and concert venues, clearly mark seating sections, entrances and exits.

Keep pathways clear and easy to follow. Maintain open, uncluttered walkways and clear sightlines to entrances, exits and service areas. In galleries and exhibit spaces, avoid overcrowded displays or floor obstacles that may interrupt navigation.

Provide or identify seating areas where visitors can rest, especially in lobbies, and waiting areas. In arts and cultural settings, seating between exhibits or near performance spaces can help visitors pause and reorient throughout their visit.

Use lighting to support safe movement. Keep lighting as even as possible and reduce glare or shadows. In theaters and cinemas, maintain low but sufficient lighting to support orientation.

Reduce noise and sensory distractions when possible. Lower background noise in shared spaces or offer quieter times. In theaters and cinemas, reduce pre-show noise and limit sudden announcements to create a calmer environment.

Offer a place to take a break. Identify a quieter area—such as a lobby, hallway, side gallery or seating area—where visitors can step away if they feel overwhelmed.

Make staff easy to identify. Use name badges or uniforms so visitors can quickly find help when needed.

CREATE DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY ARTS AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

Offer smaller or slower-paced experiences. In museums and galleries, provide guided discussions or memory-focused tours. In cinemas, offer daytime or lower-stimulation screenings.

Use familiar and engaging content. In theaters and concert venues, include well-known music, classic productions or culturally familiar themes that support recognition and connection.

Encourage participation without pressure. Focus on conversation, creativity and shared experience rather than correct answers. In museums, use open-ended discussion rather than formal interpretation.

Offer flexibility. Let visitors move, take breaks or leave and return as needed. In theaters and performance venues, make it clear that guests may exit and re-enter without disruption.

Provide clear and simple materials. Use large-print programs or simplified guides. In galleries and exhibits, offer shorter descriptions, visual prompts or labeled highlights to support understanding.

Offer sensory-friendly options. In theaters, provide relaxed performances with adjusted sound and lighting. In cinemas, offer screenings with lower volume and lights partially raised.

Provide quieter times. In museums and cultural venues, offer low-sensory visiting hours with fewer crowds and reduced noise.

Prepare staff and facilitators. Train docents, ushers and educators to adjust pacing, simplify communication and guide visitors through programs when needed.

Partner with the community. Work with local dementia and aging organizations to develop and promote programs for people with dementia and their care partners.

FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Become a Dementia Friend
dfamerica.org/become-a-dementia-friend/

Alzheimer's Association Helpline
800-272-3900 | www.alz.org



Find or Start a Memory Cafe
dfamerica.org/

Eldercare Locator
800-677-1116 | eldercare.acl.gov



Scan or visit
dfamerica.org/resource-listing



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