

Cultural Mediation, Museums and Diverse Audiences

# Recommendations

## Inclusive Access to Museums

A section of the  
Guide for an Inclusive  
Experience

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# Table of Contents

3	<b>Introduction</b>
8	<b>1 Stages prior to the cultural mediation project</b>
8	1.1 Point of departure
8	1.2 Forms of collaboration in the project's development
12	1.3 Foundations for collaboration in the project's development
12	1.4 Identification of the communities and individuals for whom the project was intended
14	1.5 Coherence between the sites and the project
16	1.6 Participatory creation structure
18	<b>2 Ideation and preparation of mediations</b>
18	2.1 Diversity and participation. Mediation between the museum and the groups concerned
24	2.2 Mediation, art and communication with the audience
32	2.3 Drivers of an inclusive experience
36	<b>3 Implementation of the mediations</b>
36	3.1 Outside support
38	3.2 Reception
39	3.3 Attention to comfort
41	3.4 Carrying out a cultural mediation activity
44	<b>4 Wrapping up the activity</b>
45	<b>5 Bibliographie</b>

**“Having access  
to culture  
isn’t a  
privilege but  
a right!”**

(Activist and worker, deaf community)

## Introduction

This guide is the result of an action research project explained in the chapter 1 (p. 9). The project, entitled *Museum Accessibility for Marginalized Audiences: Adapted Tools (2018–2020)*, had two main objectives. The first was, in the context of the exhibition *InterReconnaissance. Retracing Struggles for Recognition* (Écomusée du fier monde 2019), to experiment with mediation formats specifically adapted for groups of marginalized persons from community organizations as well as service-organization users and members of human rights groups. The second was to create a guide.

The recommendations presented here stem from a synthesis of focus groups and an analysis of cultural mediation activities carried out by the research team (see list, p. ii), both within the Écomusée du fier monde and in certain community groups in Montreal and Quebec City (2019).<sup>1</sup> The interviews were held with community organizations directly contacted by our team, as well as with four national coalitions of organizations and issue tables, namely the Centre justice et foi and the Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes immigrantes et réfugiées (TCRI), the Confédération des organismes de personnes handicapées du Québec (COPHAN) and the Regroupement des ressources alternatives en santé mentale (RRASMQ) [see list, p. ii].

## Cultural mediation and issues of diversity

Within the wide spectrum of conceptions of cultural mediation, we have adopted a broad definition as an action that serves as an interface between museums, stakeholders from the social sector, audiences and exhibition content (works and artifacts).

Thus, we blend together two senses of the term. The first, which is more conventional in the museum sector, is cultural mediation as a technique for relating to the public, an intermediary linking audiences with “what is provided for them to see” (Montpetit 2011 : 215, translated freely).<sup>2</sup> The focus in this context is on promoting audiences’ understanding and appropriation of content.

The second is the one originally advocated by socio-artistic sectors. From this perspective, cultural mediation 1) means opening up to the knowledge and culture of the audiences themselves; 2) entails taking an interest in diverse

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 1 In addition to the research team, certain individuals, chosen for their knowledge of the museum and community-organization sectors, reviewed and contributed to this document. We are most grateful to them. Their names can be found under the “Review Panel” heading (see list, p. iv).

2 See the chapter 5 (p. 97).

audiences, including those more remote from the museum offer; and 3) very often involves partners, for example, non-profit, community or activist groups (Lafortune & Legault 2012 : 43). In the words of Chaumier and Mairesse, the aim here is to “allow men and women to engage in action to take greater ownership by seizing the opportunity to be confronted with themselves and others....” (2013 : 32, translated freely). In other words, this is cultural mediation as a “project that provides roots for the freedom to think, to exchange ideas and, in so doing, to build the civic space of democracy” (2013: 48, translated freely)<sup>3</sup>.

This combination of two senses of the term is fundamental when setting out to enrich the museum experience of audiences associated with communities marginalized in society and in arts and cultural institutions—as in the case of the action research project and the development of this guide. In this context, cultural mediation must have a twofold goal: first, to put in place corrective measures that enable museums to adapt to the needs and aspirations of these audiences and encourage the appropriation of the content they are presented with, and second, to generate broader and deeper reflection. Indeed, how can (and should) culture and art be enriched by contact with diversity? How can culture and art nurture awareness and (re)empowerment? Promoting critical thinking through art enriches marginalized communities’ experience of museums. And an experience of cultural mediation that encompasses an emotional dimension promotes sharing in humanity and gives meaning to senseless social suffering. The affective and playful dimensions of the content and the facilitation for audiences who have been (and still are) subjected to injustices encourage learning and give new meaning to their experience.

## **Inclusive access to museums: a multifaceted reality**

The notion of inclusive access to museums requires a consideration of several issues that extend well beyond what we explore in this guide. Among other things, it calls for an in-depth re-examination of what is being collected and what culturally and artistically counts as part of the content to be protected and made visible. For example, how can artists from diverse backgrounds be better recognized and how might institutions and collections better correspond to them? How can history be revised to include the experiences of minority groups? How might it be possible to archive and present a tangible and intangible heritage that is both shared and plural? How can society’s diversity be reflected back to it thanks to and by means of a fair representation of this diversity?

.....  
 3 See the chapter 4 (p. 83) for more on the theoretical conceptions associated with cultural mediation.

Inclusive access to museums also requires an understanding of the complexity of museum institutions, which are themselves diversified according to different genres (art, science, history, etc.), statutes (national, municipal, community, etc.) and approaches. Moreover, it requires updating the many levels of hierarchy involved (e.g., the power of a national museum in relation to an ecomuseum, the prestige of professional art as opposed to amateur cultural practices, etc.).

Finally, it calls for paying attention to the internal workings of museums, which are often hierarchically structured among different departments and different categories of workers and are subject to a variety of power relationships. As Lynch (2013) notes, thinking about their capacity for inclusion requires that we ask ourselves: Which communities are present (or not) among the institution's staff? How is power distributed? How can it be better circulated and shared? Beyond the work team, who are the museum's partners? Who can influence its directions? In line with which perspectives and interests? What role is assigned to various social groups? How are the institution's audiences envisioned? What forms of participation are made available to them?

## The choice of participation

This guide does not intend to answer all of these questions, far from it, but rather focuses on museum conditions that foster a diversification of audiences, and on the question of cultural mediation. The guide is resolute in adopting a participatory orientation, since it recognizes, first, that marginalized communities possess rich artistic knowledge, experience and practices, even if these are (at least in part) different from those put forward by so-called legitimate institutions; and second, that the encounter should not be one-directional—"them" coming to "us" to assimilate our content. Genuine encounter presupposes dialogue and the mutual enrichment of all parties. For there to be a real encounter, the people concerned must be able to steer and influence cultural mediation, so that it reflects them, so they can make it their own, and so they can contribute to more profoundly changing ways of being and ways of doing things. This emphasis on participation is, moreover, a very common hallmark of the non-profit, community and activist groups from the communities with which museums must work—as the literature very clearly states that they must, if they are to truly reach these audiences.

Therefore, at the very least, developing cultural mediation entails some reflection on the relevance of people's participation at several levels: activity ideation and development; concrete implementation; and the space given to the audiences involved. It also requires action on the accessibility of the museum itself, of the exhibition, and then of the mediation activity. These different levels are addressed throughout this document.

## Particularities of this guide

The action research on which this guide is based was conducted with and among people from three historically minoritized groups: persons with disabilities, persons with mental health problems and immigrants. The recommendations set forth here are thus rooted in the issues, knowledge and perspectives of these groups. However, while practical experience and the literature show that an adaptation originally designed for one group will generally serve many other group—hence lending this guide a degree of generalizability—it is nevertheless essential to always clarify from the outset with whom one is designing and carrying out a cultural mediation activity, for which audiences, and in which context. There is no recipe for cultural mediation. It requires a command of general principles; a thorough knowledge of the partnering or collaborating groups, the audiences and the contents explored; and know-how and personal expertise that is responsive to the lived situation at hand.

The particularity of this guide is that it explores cultural mediation. There are many other guides, training courses, case studies and theoretical contributions that address other issues equally fundamental in fostering a greater inclusion of diverse audiences within museums. A selection of such resources can be found in the chapter 5 (p. 97). It should also be noted that community organizations for persons with disabilities have been very proactive on the issue of cultural sites' accessibility and that two important guides exist (although the adoption of and compliance with these measures remains a challenge): *Accueillir les personnes handicapées dans les musées : Une démarche simple pour des services adaptés* and *Guide pour élaborer une muséographie universellement accessible* (both published by the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications et de la Condition féminine du Québec, in 2009 and 2012 respectively).

There are several forms and techniques of cultural mediation in the museum sector. While this guide is intended to provide overall principles that are suggested for consideration, the research team did focus on one of the most widely used forms, i.e., a guided tour of an exhibition. Other formats would therefore require some adaptation.

We also set out to enrich this guided tour with a participatory artistic experience, another form often featured in museum settings. It will become apparent how and why we view this as a rich form of inclusion for diverse audiences.

The action research project and this guide were produced in partnership with the Écomusée du fier monde. The present guide is therefore aimed primarily at museum institutions. However, most of the recommendations are also relevant to all cultural and artistic institutions, even if they are not mentioned here, to avoid overburdening the text. Finally, several components may also be useful to non-profit, community or advocacy organizations wishing to carry out cultural mediation and participatory creation activities.

## How to read this guide

This guide has been designed to provide the richest possible museum experience for diverse audiences. For museums, putting the guide into practice obviously brings multiple issues into play, including those associated with transforming certain ways of conceiving and implementing mediation (which also touches on the issue of training), with the sharing of expertise and power, and with human, financial and temporal resources. It must therefore be adapted in accordance with these issues.

**The guide contains six different elements that are clearly identified by the following formatting:**



Quotations of action research respondents;

*...Les activités...*

The recommendations themselves and further details and additional information;

Musée

The persons responsible for implementing the recommendation;



Specifications for off-site mediation activities and for the participatory creation structure;



Certain topics that are explored in greater depth in the inserts;

(p. 123),  
([http://](#)), →

Links to other sections of the report or important existing resources.

In the guide you will also find a summary of the recommendations in the following chapter (p. 71).

## 1

## Stages prior to the cultural mediation project

### 1.1 Point of departure

**Circumscribe the project** that will be subject to cultural mediation.

Museum

*Is the idea to create an exhibition, an activity to highlight the content of an existing exhibition, a collection or topic, a special project, etc.?*

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**Realistically assess the resources** involved.

Museum

*The project must be commensurate with the means available, be they human, material, financial, logistical or infrastructure adaptation-related, to avoid creating unrealistic expectations or exhausting the persons involved. Consideration must also be given to the time and resources required for non-profit, community or activist partners and collaborators. It is important to think about the possibility of pay or some form of compensation for partners.*

*More upstream coordination will be required for mediation activities with groups that have special needs. This aspect is not to be neglected.*

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### 1.2 Forms of collaboration in the project's development

Define the **partnership approach** that the museum wishes to adopt in developing and putting together the project.

Museum and, sometimes, partner group(s)

*There are several options: carry out the overall project alone, enlist one or more partner groups, or call on people from outside the institution to design and carry out the project. NB Sometimes it is groups or individuals who approach museums to develop a project. In this case, points 1.1. and 1.2. may be inverted.*

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Identify **partner(s)** if this is the chosen option.

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Museum

Create a **collaborative structure** if the mediation project is carried out in partnership or by people from outside the museum.

Museum and partner group(s)

*Regardless of what the museum identified when circumscribing the project (1.1, p. 34), it is extremely important for the initiator of the project to be attentive to the wishes and needs of the partner group(s). Co-construction is to be encouraged, which implies that the museum must revise its initial ideas in communication with its partner(s), working together.*

*This structure—often a steering or organizing committee—allows for a common understanding of objectives, joint organization of activities, and the availability of staff (especially reception and mediation staff) who can reinforce the aims of the project in the context of their dealings with participants. It should include people from within the museum (for example, service directors and people involved in education, mediation and contact with the audience, and, crucially, those who are going to develop the planned activity), and members of partner groups. Other people may be added, namely experts related to the content being explored, researchers, other members of the communities, etc. If the activity has an artistic component, it is recommended that the artist be included in this structure as early on as possible (see section 1.6; p. 42).*

*The more rooted the experience is in the museum itself, the more likely it is to be appropriated and to have a concrete influence on the institution's usual ways of doing things. It is strongly recommended to hold a presentation on the project and raise awareness of the issues it raises for all of the museum's "teams," even if this can be demanding for large institutions.*

*The commitment that this requires from the museum, in the way of both resources and openness to working with others and questioning ways of doing things, should not be minimized. The same applies to the partner group(s).*

## Diverse formats of partnership and collaboration

In this guide, we outline a form of partnership and collaboration for a mediation activity accompanied by a participatory creation structure. There are, however, many forms of collaboration between museums and social-sector organizations. Sometimes, a collaboration can be for the duration of developing an exhibition or a mediation workshop, organizing a special event, etc. Other times, more lasting collaboration may be established, as in the case of a yearly exhibition implemented under a partnership, a cyclically recurring off-site project in organizations, the presence of group members on museum committees, etc. Finally, some institutions also devote space to activities by community members who assume responsibility for their project.

Reflect on the relevance of the **by and for** model, i.e., the presence or absence of a part of the targeted audience among the people organizing and carrying out the activity

Members of the collaborative structure

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**“Power  
to the  
marginalized!”**

(Activist, mental health sector)

## By and for

By and for is a principle of activism that features prominently in rights movements and certain non-profit sectors. Under this principle, the priority is for action to be directed by and for those primarily concerned. This entails a refusal to delegate decision-making and representation powers to a third party outside the group—although, of course, certain forms of collaboration with partners are also possible.

“By and for” emphasizes three elements: the value placed on the experience, expertise and knowledge of the people concerned; self-determination; and the appropriation of power. The idea is to move away from people as an “object” of care, specific measures, representations, etc. and toward a stance as “subject” and then “actor.”

By and for also figures in demands made by the cultural and artistic sectors—associated in particular with the participatory museology movement—and forms the basis of certain original initiatives, especially in museums (see, among others, Lynch 2013, Perla and Ullah 2019, and the OF/ BY/ FOR ALL website, <https://www.ofbyforall.org/vision>).

As in many other sectors, there is no consensus on by and for. Moreover, applying this principle poses serious challenges in the context of often small work teams and a lack of resources.

However, this principle does raise essential questions:

1. The question of the representation of marginalized communities within the institution itself (work team, collection, exhibition);
2. The question of an organizational modus operandi that all too often requires that the people in question be consulted downstream and not upstream—which can lead either to corrections that could have been avoided or to the inability to meet needs (“what’s done is done and it would be too expensive to change it”);
3. And finally, the question of a “fair share” to be redistributed when the people from these communities are very often called upon for their expertise but rarely paid to carry out the projects, and scarcely receive the recognition they are due.

### 1.3 Foundations for collaboration in the project's development

Make sure that **key values are shared**, since there must be a match between the museum's values, the activities that are planned, the potential partners and the targeted audiences.

Members of the collaborative structure

Agree on **intentions, directions and overall goals**.

Members of the collaborative structure

*Clarify the overall orientations and objectives of the project from the idea-tion stage by assessing its impacts for the museum and the partner organizations, the relationship to be developed or strengthened between the two, and the participants in the mediation activities.*

*This explanation also facilitates evaluation.*

Agree on **decision-making processes** by carefully thinking about formal and informal power relationships.

Members of the collaborative structure

Agree on a project **budget** and its allocation.

Museum and partner(s) or members of the collaborative structure

### 1.4 Identification of the communities and individuals for whom the project was intended

Musée et partenaire(s) ou les membres de la structure collaborative

Develop a **good knowledge** of the targeted communities or individuals and their needs with respect to museums.

Members of the collaborative structure + mediator(s) if not on the committee and any other person(s) involved in creating the activity - artist(s) and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation (see section 3.4, p. 41, for explanations on co-mediation)

*The knowledge of the people and communities targeted can obviously be based on the expertise of the non-profit, community or advocacy partners. Two other strategies can also be complementary: a literature review and a consultation with representatives of the groups.*

*Beware of preconceptions and prejudices, as well as the tendency to standardize a certain vision of communities. **They are made up of diverse people** with different needs and perspectives, different and sometimes divergent requirements, different relationships to culture and to museums, etc.*

Consider the **composition of groups of audiences**, i.e., mixed or not. This choice varies according to context, communities and intentions.

Members of the collaborative structure

## **“It is in eliminating barriers between people that we break down prejudices.”**

(Worker, immigration sector)

*Most of the interviewees recommended mixed groups—although some recognized the importance of non-mixing in specific contexts, either because a group needed to get (back) together and reconnect first, or because the issue being explored was too sensitive or controversial.*

*The choice of mixing was also consistent with the narrative framework of the exhibition selected for our action research, which promoted inter-recognition between the struggles of the various sectors of the community movement.*

*In the formation of mixed groups, it is important to take individuals’ characteristics into account: some groups may have differences that are difficult to reconcile.*

Consider the **diversity (or non-diversity) of the audiences** you are trying to reach: one community, several or all.

Members of the collaborative structure

## **“An adaptation required by or intended for a community will very often meet the needs of many other people that we hadn’t thought of.”**

(Worker, immigration sector)

*This issue is not necessarily relevant for the entire mission of a museum, given that, because of guiding principles or economic imperatives, museums must make themselves accessible to the widest possible pool of people.*

*However, it can be explored in the context of special projects, even if it is delicate. The demands are many and legitimate, but the means are limited! A proliferation of non-recurring activities aimed at multiple audiences can have a perverse effect. These activities respond to a need on an ad hoc basis and may make people from some of the communities want to strengthen their presence within the institution, but then, when the temporary structure disappears, the bond of trust can be broken.*

## 1.5 Coherence between the sites and the project

Make sure that the **site is suitable for the planned activities and the targeted audiences**. For a museum, it is also necessary to be open to thinking about off-site mediation activities if a need has been expressed to this effect.

Members of the collaborative structure + mediator(s) if not on the committee and any other person(s) involved in creating the activity - artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

**“It’s not only up to us to approach the institutions and the arts and culture that they offer.”**

(Activist, mental health sector)

## Off-site mediation activities

Off-site mediation activities, i.e., activities organized outside museums—in a square, a park, a hospital, a community organization or non-profit, etc.—have been growing in number and importance over the past several decades.

This movement is often associated with the principle of cultural democracy. This principle rejects the hierarchy of various cultural forms, promotes popular culture and the cultures of minority or minoritized groups, recognizes the social role that culture plays, and favours active participation in it.

There are several reasons why it may be difficult to come to a museum, either for a first experience or on an ongoing basis: the notion that “the museum isn’t for us,” collections or exhibitions seen as problematic or unrepresentative of a community, the language(s) available in the institution, financial resources, geographical distance, travel limitations (for physical or health/living condition-related reasons), the need to be introduced to the topics of an exhibition in a reassuring and familiar “safe space”—see the Mental Health Commission of Canada guide: [https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2019-03/safer\\_space\\_guidelines\\_mar\\_2019\\_eng.pdf](https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2019-03/safer_space_guidelines_mar_2019_eng.pdf), etc.

It can also be interesting to think differently about the ties between museums and organizations in the community or social sector. What might a museum accomplish by travelling to its targeted audiences? What might it learn about people and cultural transmission when confronted with the places, values and ways of doing things of the people it approaches? What happens when the museum is the entity that goes out to other spaces and not the people in other spaces who comply with the rules of the museum (however well adapted they may be)?

Exchanges, or some form of reciprocity, may be desired by certain actors in the social sector. Among other things, this museological presence in their organization can encourage a better appropriation of the experience (Betancur Botero 2019). For their part, the mediators from the museum can develop a better knowledge of the realities of this “audience.” However, care must be taken in terms of the resources (human, financial and temporal) that hosting this activity requires for the work team and group members—even more so when high levels of participation are required. Thought must be given to forms of compensation, particularly financial.

## 1.6 Participatory creation structure

Consider the undeniable contribution of an activity involving both mediation and a **participatory creative structure** led by an experienced artist.

Members of the  
collaborative structure

*This creative structure represents added value: it can shape how the exhibition is explored, understood and received, enriching the site itself and the experience, and offer a more sensitive way of experiencing encounters with others.*

## Participatory creation structure

The term “participatory creation structure” is used here in its broadest sense, including all possible configurations of participatory creation: free drawings inspired by the exhibition and the mediation experience; shared language forms such as the development of a fable or a poem; physical structures (an installation), irrespective of the artistic discipline involved; etc.

Creations can be individual—even if they come under a group activity—or collective. They may also involve various levels of participation: interacting with (and within) a structure, collaborating on a work, or even co-creating it.

Having the activity directed by an experienced artist seems essential to us here, even if the designation of “artist” minimizes their professional status in favour of their knowledge of and experience with art. Indeed, they must also master participatory creation and mediation with audiences traditionally marginalized by artistic and cultural institutions.

Potentially, at least for some people, announcing a participatory art session serves as an incentive—as a way to attract people. Moreover, the activity can be experienced as a “breath of fresh air” after all the concentration required by the mediation activity; at least this is what several participants in our action research told us.

The artistic experience most often opens up a relaxed space of play that is more experiential and less intellectualizing, and that fosters conversation, attention to others, and dialogue. This is even though (and probably because) the session takes place at a more informal time, as the conversation unfolds in the context of more restricted and intimate interaction.

In several ways, artistic engagement and participation in creation promote a demystification of museum space: people can then be present while “doing something” on the premises, i.e., handling or playing with artifacts or artworks, thus encouraging an appropriation of the exhibition and its topic in a playful way, even co-creating something.

Artistic engagement also offers a different way of accessing the content (be it scientific, artistic, historical, etc.) and art itself: participants can get closer to and have a better grasp of the material.

Audiences' participation in a participatory work can strengthen their sense of having contributed something, rather than merely being on the "receiving" end.

Some people are reluctant about this form of participation. Others prefer to observe rather than participate—even if many, after observing, do end up choosing to participate.

See the description of the structure created by Fanny H-Levy, *NOUS, dess(e)in*, involved in the action research (see chapter 1, p. 9). Also see the video *Traces, nos visages* directed by Fanny H-Levy and Francine Saillant: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wUjujQ-u-D8&feature=youtu.be>.

Select an **artist or group of artists** as quickly as possible (ideally from the early stages) so that the entire project can be conceptualized in an integrated fashion.

Members of the collaborative structure

*Having the artist on board from the beginning of the conceptualization stage and integrated within the collaborative structure helps tie the various components of the project together and ensure that the artistic structure fits in seamlessly, is coherent and meets established objectives. This also gives art its rightful place, as it is often somewhat marginalized as an entertaining "sideline" or instrumentalized as one tool of cultural mediation among others. Depending on their unique perspective and knowledge, the artist can also inform the project as a whole.*

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## 2

## Ideation and preparation of mediations

## 2.1 Diversity and participation. Mediation between the museum and the groups concerned

## 2.1.1 The relationship between the museum and the organizing partners

Clarify the **specific goals of the project** from the ideation stage by assessing its impacts for the museum and the partner organizations, the relationship to be developed or strengthened between the two, and the participants in the mediation activities.

*This explanation also facilitates evaluation.*

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Agree on a **timetable and a distribution of tasks**.

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Consider the **forms of consultation or collaboration to be implemented** with the targeted community or communities.

*At this stage, too, it is necessary to reflect on each party's contribution and on formal and informal power relationships. It is important to clarify who has decision-making authority as well as what will be shared, when and how.*

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## 2.1.2 Relationships with community organizations and formation of groups of audiences

Beyond the groups involved in conceptualizing the activity, identify the **relevant community, non-profit or activist collaborators to reach out to in order to mobilize audiences** and adapt the activity in agreement with them, taking into account their vision of the issues explored by the exhibition and the mediation activities, and their group's needs.

*Work with a clearly designated person.*

Members of the collaborative structure + mediator(s) if not on the committee and any other person(s) involved in creating the activity—artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

Members of the collaborative structure + mediator(s) if not on the committee and any other person(s) involved in creating the activity—artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

Members of the collaborative structure + mediator(s) if not on the committee

Persons concretely involved in implementing the activity—mediator(s), artist, other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the members of the collaborative structure

Depending on the context, this **reference person** may be a worker or a peer. Be sure to explain to this person the nature of cultural mediation, the objectives of the activity and what form it takes. Some psychosocial workers do not use the same approaches and this can, at times, create “clashes of culture” that are not conducive to audiences’ full participation.

The reference person’s ability to mobilize people is crucial, as is their involvement in communicating information on both sides: mediation team and participants.

This consultation work helps better understand whom one is addressing, to prepare the visit to the museum either by making a prior introductory presentation—which can provide a better understanding of the everyday realities of the targeted audience and the dynamics of the organization—or by communicating the content of the activity and making sure that the information is properly conveyed to the participants. It is also advisable to work with this reference person in devising communication tools for the members of the group (invitation letter, visit guide, etc.) to make sure that information is properly adapted and presented in a format that will help mobilize members.

Do not underestimate the work this can represent for these organizations, which often lack financial, human and temporal resources. Consider providing some form of support or financial assistance that can help with coordination and mobilization, or covering transportation and snacks for participants.

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Having **a staff member who is specifically devoted to creating and maintaining ties with social organizations** is considered a plus for museums.

Over time, this person can strengthen their knowledge of various audiences and develop bonds of trust with organizations and their members. This position already exists in a number of museums.

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Take into account **the concerns that are crucial for certain groups** and consider adaptations to specific needs

*Our action research uncovered priority areas, according to some of the communities consulted.*

*The disability sector exhibited a constant concern for material and human mediation that would foster inclusive access.*

*In mental health, people emphasized their desire for concrete participation in activities.*

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Museum

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The people concretely involved in carrying out the activity -facilitator(s), artist, other individual(s) involved in co-mediation in collaboration with the reference persons and the members of the collaborative structure

*In the recent migration sector, emphasis was placed on the many difficulties encountered that make the idea of going to the museum unattractive, and hence on the importance of thinking, instead, of activities that would take place in the community organization itself.*

*It should be noted that some groups' participation may also depend on the rules that an organization has established to respond to specific issues experienced by its members: for example, some place particular emphasis on following rules and instructions. These rules must be known and taken into account by the people concretely involved in the activity's implementation—mediator(s), artist, other individual(s) involved in co-mediation.*

Reflect on the **connection between the invited audiences and the topic of the exhibition** or the mediation activity.

*Two points are important in this respect:*

- *First, having an exhibition or activity that people feel they can identify with can sometimes be an incentive to go to the museum;*
- *Second, at least for some marginalized people, a mediation experience must also be informed by their experience and knowledge: move away from the idea of transmission in favour of sharing, and take care not to reproduce social hierarchies in the lived experience.*

*Be aware that needs may be diverse and a person may not want to participate or may wish to visit at their own pace so they can learn from the exhibition on their own without having to disclose anything about themselves.*

*For the action research, our exhibition content was extremely close to the participants' life experience, dealt with the rights struggles of the organizations that represent them, and contained oral and written testimonies from activists. Not only were many participants aware of their realities, but they were also familiar with the issues, struggles and people featured in the exhibition. A few had participated in the research that led to the exhibition or were in the exhibition itself. This non-outsider status paved the way for participants to more easily identify with the exhibition, and to want to express their thoughts on it.*

**Members of the collaborative structure + mediator(s) if not on the committee and any other person(s) involved in creating the activity—artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation**

## Different stances of mediation

Practitioners and theorists point to a plurality of roles that cultural mediation can play and, by the same token, the plurality of figures of the mediator. Serge Chaumier and François Mairesse (2013) talk about three figures:

- The “intermediary” who focuses on the content and adopts a logic of instructing, transmitting information and popularizing science;
- The “community organizer” who is primarily interested in the relational dimensions and is associated with more traditional roles of community development;
- The “catalyst” who advocates participatory or collaborative processes.

The roles of mediation necessarily depend on the intent of the project in which the relational practice takes place (Lafortune 2017). Is the idea to initiate people into artistic practice for the first time (initiating)? Is it to impart knowledge about arts and culture (interpreting)? Is it to create links between people (enabling dialogue and forging social ties)?

At the Écomusée du fier monde, where the action research was carried out, the practices first and foremost fell under the category of transmission, i.e., exhibitions (permanent and temporary) and guided tours communicating knowledge about the works and artifacts, their context of emergence and the historical and social elements relevant to understanding them.

The Écomusée also features practices that connect individuals, which are manifested in the skills and know-how of the mediator and in the willingness to explore links between the territory and its inhabitants, the social history of Quebec, and more particularly the history of the Centre-Sud neighbourhood of Montreal.

At the Écomusée, mediation is generally provided by museum employees with skills in management, content ideation and operations. The size of the museum requires versatility in terms of skills (Giroux 2016).

**Make sure that the cultural experience addresses more than one dimension of people’s life experience** or only the difficulties or challenges they face.

*To give two examples from our interviews:*

- Avoid systematically associating newcomers with employment and productivity issues

The people concretely involved in implementing the activity—mediator(s), artist, other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the members of the collaborative structure

**“It’s as if the cultural world is antithetical to the condition of immigrants, who should just be useful and provide for themselves.”**

(Activist and worker, immigration sector)

- Avoid overemphasizing the realities of people living with mental health difficulties

**“They don’t want to plunge back into this... They’ve heard enough about it!”**

(Worker, mental health sector)

Examine the interest of **reaching out to young people in the communities concerned**, using formats and venues appropriate for them.

*The aim is to make young people into ambassadors either in promoting art and culture or in defending their rights or citizenship. Another idea is to foster an appropriation and transmission of the history of parents or previous generations—a history that is sometimes difficult, even traumatic, that had not been told before and that allows young people to better understand their parents, their community and society.*

Persons concretely involved in implementing the activity—mediator(s), artist(s), other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the members of the collaborative structure

Promote activities that allow for **intergenerational dialogue**.

This addresses three goals:

1. Providing a forum for sharing experiences and knowledge;
2. Fostering “inter-recognition” and concerted action;
3. In the specific context of the action research, providing a better knowledge of the history of realities experienced by communities and their past struggles to defend their rights, which is essential for community, non-profit and social movements.

Persons concretely involved in implementing the activity—mediator(s), artist(s), other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the members of the collaborative structure

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### • Specificities of the participatory creation structure •

Choose a participatory creation structure that is **adapted to the different audiences**, contextually appropriate, and created either specifically for the exhibition or its topic, or in alignment with it.

The artist in collaboration with the mediator(s) and members of the collaborative structure

*See here the guides and works on the concepts of universal design or universal accessibility that can be found at the beginning of the chapter 5 (p. 97). These concepts speak to the idea of providing environments, products, services and communications that are appropriate and usable by all and require the fewest possible number of specific adaptations.*

*Thus the participatory creation mechanism must be as accessible as possible and, within its very design, take into account the limitations that may be encountered by the audiences one wishes to work with. In spite of this fundamental consideration, it is advisable to have a “Plan B” in case one or more people are unable to participate, otherwise feelings of rejection and incompetence may result.*

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## 2.2 Mediation, art and communication with the audience

### 2.2.1 Communication

Consider **communication issues**: both the language itself (English, Spanish, Quebec Sign Language [LSQ], etc.), levels of formality (being accessible), the cultural references involved (conceptual knowledge related to a unique field such as art or to cultural elements—law, the state and rights advocacy do not mean the same thing to everyone), and the tools used to communicate [The mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the members of the collaborative structure].

La ou les personnes médiatrices, l'artiste et autre(s) individu(s) impliqué(s) dans la co-médiation, en collaboration avec les membres de la structure collaborative

**“The exhibition can be modified so as to be seen and interpreted in new ways... truly a 360-degree outlook.”**

(Worker, immigration sector – refugees)

*The intent is not so much to avoid more specialized or academic terms as to define them, or even co-define them together at the time of the activity, either to confirm a common understanding or, to the contrary, to better be able to discuss different interpretative spaces.*

*Communication tools must also be adapted, among others, for audiences from the deaf community and persons living with visual or learning impairments (see the Guide Accessibilité universelle des outils de communication 2016, <https://altergo.ca/fr/nouvelles/nouvelles-daltergo/une-nouvelle-edition-du-guide-accessibilite-universelle-des-outils-de>).*

Create a **visit guide** (Appendix 6, p. 142) that is as clear, succinct and accessible as possible. This guide must be drafted in a language and format suitable for the targeted audiences and provided to the participants prior to the tour.

The mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in the co-mediation, the reference persons

**“People need to be able to imagine what to expect in order to make an informed decision as to whether or not the activity is right for them and whether they’ll be able to prepare properly in advance.”**

(Activist and worker, disabled sector – neurodiversity)

*This guide can be created with the groups themselves—which ensures its adaptability—but can also be helpful in mobilization efforts.*

*It must include:*

1. *Practical information, such as start and end times, available languages, how to get to the institution, a map of the premises, available and unavailable accessibility measures, specific regulations (the right to carry a backpack, mandatory or prohibited clothing, the right or not to touch the works or eat during the tour), etc.;*
2. *A description of the exhibition itself and of the mediation activity, clearly explaining their different stages, what participants will be asked to do (specify whether they will have the possibility of participating, of withdrawing, of doing a self-guided visit, etc.), whether sensitive topics are addressed, and noise and light levels.*

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Develop **communication tools** adapted to the targeted audiences.

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Museum

*Beyond the mediation activity itself, museums are encouraged to review the universal accessibility of their websites and various communications and to highlight relevant information for audiences with special needs (ideally on their homepage). To this end, the information must be practical, detailed, given in different languages, cover varying degrees of understanding, and provided through diverse means of communication (images, pictograms, subtitles, video, etc.). Mailing lists should include organizations that work*

with diverse audiences. Some communities require specific or sustained communication efforts.

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### ← Off-site particularities →

Develop arguments to **explain the interest of a museological mediation activity** to groups and participants

*Although holding an activity within their organization is often simpler for group members—they will be more comfortable in a place and culture they are accustomed to, and unstressed by travel—the fact remains that some people may lack an understanding of the nature of the activity and what it will bring them, compared to an ordinary visit to a museum. It is important to make links between the anticipated mediation and certain components of the organizations' mission or some of their action areas.*

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The mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in the co-mediation, reference persons

## 2.2.2 Organizational elements

Be mindful of the **time allotted to the activity**, depending on the people you are addressing.

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Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person

Plan **small groups**.

*This varies according to the planned activities and the audience, but often beyond 10—or 4 for groups composed of persons in wheelchairs—it becomes difficult to move about, to respect the time allotted to the activity, to leave some room for people who wish to express themselves, and to have more informal moments for discussion and rest.*

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Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person

### ← Off-site particularities →

Anticipate **more fluctuating groups than at the museum**—even if they also fluctuate in the institution.

*The mediation will take place in a living environment where some members may simply be curious and observe the goings-on from a distance and others may only participate for a time or even come and go.*

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Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

### 2.2.3 Design a cultural mediation activity

Create an **activity that is suitable for the space at hand**.

*The activity must be designed within and in relation to the space (physical and symbolic) and reflect the physical pathway to be taken, its connection to the content and the experience of the visit.*

*This is important in order to ensure the best possible experience and participants' well-being.*

The mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the members of the collaborative structure

Offer **mediation that resonates with what is going on in the community organization**, or that is in continuity with or complementarity to it.

*If appropriate to the topic, it can be very interesting to supplement the toolbox with elements from the group itself and its members.*

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person

Maintain a focus on **enriching the community organization** through the proposed activity.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person

Bear in mind, from the ideation stage, that some people may prefer **to visit the museum on their own**—even if they come in a group, as part of mediation activities. The activities and premises' setup must therefore allow for this freedom.

The mediator(s), the artist and the other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

*This dimension is essential since inclusive access to museums implies not only the adaptability of certain special activities, but also a gradual transformation of ways of doing things so that different audiences can access culture in a variety of ways (self-guided visit, special activities, etc.), as can the audiences currently better represented in institutions.*

*Time for individual circulation can also be planned either during or at the end of the activity.*

Develop **mediation that generates a lived, experiential space**; that is open and uses **creative strategies and art**; that focuses not only on rationality, but on sensibility and the senses; and that opens up the **possibility of involvement**.

The mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the members of the collaborative structure

*Think to diversify the modes of participation (verbal and non-verbal / drawing and writing / in groups and alone). Different ways of participating must be welcomed, acknowledged and validated. The most visible and audible participation often gets the most attention, but someone engaged in contemplation and personal reflection can also have a rich experience that should not be underestimated.*

Design the cultural mediation activity in the form of a **toolbox**, providing a variety of ways to access the exhibition (content that is more factual, aesthetic, discursive, physical artifact-focused, etc.) and equally diverse tools (stories, photos, testimonies, and objects to stimulate reflection).

The mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the members of the collaborative structure

*Having many different objects (perhaps including works of art) leaves participants free to focus on those that interest them the most, even if the team may consider some tools to be a “must.”*

*Drawing and visual tools can help in the presence of language issues.*

*If there are several tours, it is often interesting to mention things said by previous participants.*

*Some elements of our toolbox especially captured participants’ attention: “fun” activities (riddles, etc.), the works presented in the exhibition, the museum objects they could handle, as well as the exhibition elements that they identified with—someone they met, some activism they participated in, or an object that directly references a lived reality.*

# The mediation toolbox of the *InterReconnaissance* exhibition

In the case of our guided tours organized at the Écomusée du fier monde, the research team had planned a scenario involving an alternation between two mediation figures (see box p. 47). There were two mediators:

- One in charge of the museum's educational activities, and possessing a thorough knowledge of the institution's history and the exhibition's ideation and production;
- The other belonging to the team, and chosen for her experience working with community groups.

Having two mediators made it possible to alternate between main speakers, which in turn promoted the active attention of the audiences. This configuration also freed up a person to assume the role of attentive and benevolent observer, provide personalized support and explanations, keep track of the time and continually monitor the group and its well-being.

The two mediators first built up a thorough knowledge of the works and objects on display, whether historical, factual or anecdotal. This point should not be overlooked, as it generally helps foster a sense of closeness to the objects and an understanding of their role. The objects must be put in context, describing how they are used, by whom and why; works require an explanation of their context of creation, the intention of the artist and their reception by audiences.

The mediation canvas was developed based on the **exhibition scenario** (Appendix 3, p. 136) drawn up by the museum's production team, i.e., the linear plan for each exhibition room, with the technical data sheet for the exhibits in each room.

The mediators had previously established mediation goals in terms of information transmission and the desired atmosphere. These goals were intrinsically linked to the exhibit's scientific focus, i.e., to the aesthetic, historical, sociological and other knowledge conveyed therein (e.g., showing the diversity of forms of discrimination presented in the exhibition). The goals also took into account indicators to qualitatively evaluate the tours (e.g., prompting participants to share their experiential relationship to the exhibition objects and topics).

A debriefing and qualitative evaluation of the tour was conducted in several ways, namely drafting of observation reports by the mediators and observers associated with the action research, a collective debriefing at the end of the tour, and an evaluation questionnaire for the participants.

Then, the mediators had selected three main objects for each topic explored in the exhibition. These were key objects, relevant for their aesthetic, spectacular or playful aspect, or their potential for discussion and knowledge transmission. For each object, they had thought up possibilities for interaction with the audiences, links with the mediation goals, and some contextual background from their own research, in addition to the knowledge presented in the labels and object data sheets within the exhibit.

The aim behind this work was to be able to select any of these key objects during any tour, and make sure that all the initial goals were met by the end of the tour at hand.

The mediators had also put together a mediation kit containing a number of small objects that could be easily carried in a bag during the tours. These items came from the museum's collections and from borrowed objects that had some historical value in connection with the exhibit. At the outset, participants were also given a **visit guide** (Appendix 6, p. 142) and an educational tool, namely a **timeline** (Appendix 7, p. 147), devised for the exhibition.

Naturally, the mediation scenario had some built-in leeway in terms of the topics addressed and discussed. For example, the mediators could choose to present an object directly upon entering a room, pass around an object from the mediation kit, or question visitors: What do you see in this room? Does any object here stand out to you? Can you read this label to me? Would you like to describe this object? What do you think it's for? Go ahead and take the time to walk around the room, have a look around, and then we can discuss the objects that speak to you.

The idea behind the mediation was to strike a balance in the tour between different moments:

- Individual and collective reflection,
- Discussion among the people in the group and with the mediators,
- Narration and knowledge transfer by mediators and other resource persons,
- Contemplation.

This balance was also sought by creating a different relationship than in conventional "walking around": In contrast with a static approach of always visiting from the same point of view (literal and figurative), the mediators' body language was intended to encourage movement and stimulate visitors' sense of observation and autonomous reflection, i.e., approaching or moving away from the object, gazing, reading, talking, listening, moving around, and even touching, handling, taking and passing along the objects in the mediation kit.

This body movement stimulated another type of attention with respect to space, the presence of others, the arrangement of objects and the direction of circulation. The different audiences were able to connect as members passed around objects and looked at and listened to one another.

In a context of mixed groups with members from different organizations, creating a sense of community contributed to a positive overall atmosphere and encouraged exchanges and mutual learning among the audiences.

## ← Off-site particularities →

Bring **traces of the exhibition**, and, if possible, artifacts or authentic works, into the community organization.

*More and more museums are developing what are sometimes called educational or instructional collections, i.e., banks of authentic works or artifacts, or reproductions thereof. These collections are used for both onsite and off-site educational and mediation activities. It is advisable to reflect on the rules for acquiring these collections, as well as the standards established for their transport and conservation.*

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, museum

### 2.2.4 Design of the participatory creation structure

Incorporate the **creative structure into the exhibition space itself**, if it is in the form of an installation.

*Staying within the same space as the exhibition allows for a variety of physical stances: going back to see the exhibition, watching on from a distance, participating in creation, etc.*

*Also, consider the possibility of allowing visitors from outside the context of mediation activities to use the structure freely. If possible and relevant, train those who will be in contact with the audiences, whether in terms of reception, volunteering, overseeing safety, etc.*

Artist and museum staff

**Connect the cultural mediation activity and the artistic structure:** imagine and conduct them jointly, in order to promote seamless coherence.

*In the action research, we had the chance to conceptualize the whole project in collaboration with the mediators and the artist (who was present from the beginning), to have specific assigned roles in mediation and creation, and to have all these individuals involved in the post-project evaluation and in the production of this guide.*

The mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the members of the collaborative structure

Think about what will happen to the **works created by the participants**.

*The possibility of leaving with the works is often highly appreciated. The same applies if some or all of the creations can be incorporated into the exhibition or become the subject of a virtual exhibition at the museum. Be careful, in this second case, to leave the choice up to each individual concerned, and to obtain their authorization.*

The mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the members of the collaborative structure

### ← Off-site particularities →

If an installation is involved, opt for a structure that can be **set up in a variety of places** (making sure it is reasonably sized and unobtrusive); easily transported; and, if necessary, quickly assembled and disassembled.

Artist and members of the collaborative structure

*It was very interesting, in this action research, to see how the structure functioned differently depending on the space, even if it was adapted to each location.*

## 2.3 Drivers of an inclusive experience

### 2.3.1 The space

Make sure that the **premises are physically** accessible.

Museum and all its employees

## Physically accessible premises

There are three fundamental principles to observe.

1. Make sure access is as inclusive as possible, so that people with special needs will not need to constantly ask for measures or accommodations during their tour.

**“I always feel like a beggar, a professional beggar. It isn’t always easy...”**

(Activist, physical disability sector)

2. Respect individuals' self-determination and requests, without requiring anyone to provide justifications, explain their condition or prove anything.
3. Finally, do not seek to conceal the presence of persons with special needs in the institution or make them invisible, e.g., assigning them back seats or the most poorly placed tables, having them come in through an "unofficial" entrance at the back of the building, etc.

NB This adaptability is as valuable to the visitors as it is to artists with disabilities or from other special-needs communities.

There are many guides on this topic; see in particular those of the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec:

*Accueillir les personnes handicapées dans les musées : une démarche simple pour des services adaptés* (2009) : <http://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/1947917>

*Guide pour élaborer une muséographie universellement accessible* (2012), <http://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/2107585>

Two organizations also offer a variety of related training options:

Kéroul (<http://www.keroul.qc.ca/en/training-programs-and-conferences.html>)

Altergo (<http://www.altergo.ca/fr/formation-altergo>)

## ← Off-site particularities →

**Be familiar with the site and the resources available**, both for the cultural mediation activity and for the artistic creation structure.

*The space for the group will, naturally, be adapted to its members. However, it is necessary to find out the site's layout, how it can be used and the material/human resources available for the planned activity. The mediation team must also explain its needs in detail.*

*It is necessary to find out about the usual uses of this space—for example, the possibility of other people moving around in it during the activity—and to make sure that the constraints are not only known, but taken into account.*

**Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person**

Permission must be sought for any changes to the space, even if temporary—among other things, moving tables around can create safety problems or hinder other people’s use of the space. Can things be put up on the walls?

Finally, an agreement will need to be reached on any potential sharing of required materials. Even if they are mainly provided by the persons initiating the activity, certain useful elements may be found on-site, and therefore may not need to be brought along.

### 2.3.2 Scheduling

Propose **schedules adapted** not to the institutional modus operandi, but to the needs of the targeted audiences, i.e., according to the times most convenient for them.

Museum, members of the collaborative structure, the mediator(s) and reference persons

Special attention must be paid to adapted transportation, physical mobility issues for certain people living, for example, with a disability or who need to take medication—the morning is a less suitable time—and convenient times for individuals with children—suggest a weekend time slot and an activity that takes children’s presence into account.

Several people mentioned some exasperation with the tendency to always offer these activities at times other than peak visitation times in the institutions. If a person needs to be accompanied by someone close to them, this can be more difficult; but more generally, **not having cultural activities on Thursday and Friday evenings, and during the day on weekends, is also frustrating, as it constantly situates these individuals as being outside the norm.**

### 2.3.3 Pricing policy

**Adopt an adequate policy on pricing;** the admission fee can be a real obstacle for audiences in the social sector.

Museum

**“We aren’t rich!”**

(Activist, physical disability sector)

*This is a delicate question, around which there is no consensus. Stances fluctuate between the danger of standardizing and stigmatizing a community (the notion that “people living with disabilities or from an immigrant background are all poor”), and the real difficulties facing some people for whom both admission and transportation fees can be a problem.*

*Generally, planned mediation activities such as the one described in this guide are free of charge. A museum must, however, think about a regular pricing policy that takes into account the fact that a part of the population is in financial difficulty. If someone wishes to go back to the museum but no longer has the means to do so, a lasting connection will be impossible. It might be more suitable to have a special price for low-income participants (without demanding proof) rather than a rate that would, for example, apply only to people living with a disability. That said, admission should be free of charge for companions, a practice made possible, for example, by the Carte accompagnement loisir (CAL) program, and, formerly, the Vignette d’accompagnement touristique et de loisir (VATL).*

*It would also be preferable for this pricing policy to be standardized across institutions, to make it more easily known to the visitors who need it.*

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## 3

## Implementation of the mediations

### 3.1 Outside support

Assign **a reference person from the invited group(s)** to the activity.

Mediator

*In addition to their presence, this individual can provide support as they know their members well and can intervene as needed.*

*Mediation work is not intervention work; it is necessary to ensure that someone is ready and qualified to respond, if needed, to the specific needs of the participants.*

*These different roles must be conceived as being complementary.*

## Complementary modes of intervention

It is recommended that mediators conducting off-site activities be attentive to the different social and cultural intervention approaches applied in the environments where their projects are carried out.

First and foremost, whether in a socio-community, health or educational setting, activities should be carried out in cooperation with and in the presence of qualified people from the community in question. Collaboration helps better understand the specific issues that mediators may encounter, namely health conditions, functional limitations (motor skills, hearing, sight, cognition, etc.), communication issues, concentration capacity, mental health status, knowledge of the language and cultural and historical references, cultural codes, comfort level with learning, speaking up or engaging in play and games, etc.

Moreover, observing other relational practices not directly related to cultural transmission can bring to light skills that can guide the mediator's relationships. The chapter 4 (p. 83) contains more information and references on the various approaches briefly presented here.

It is possible to draw on knowledge developed in **intercultural mediation** (Dursun 2001). According to Cohen-Emerique and Fayman (2005), the skills of an intercultural mediator primarily come down to interpersonal skills, i.e., adaptations in their behaviour, dress or language.

An intercultural mediator's chief asset is sharing the language or even sharing similar geographic origins. Adapted behaviours also include being attentive to hierarchical relationships within a group (parents-children, men-women, youths-seniors), and even norms and manners around how to address individuals' status, as well as propriety in phatic communication (asking how someone is doing, enquiring about someone's health, avoiding starting off a session by stating one's goal too directly, etc.). According to these authors, it is also important, during exchanges, to recall the traditional values of the culture of origin, and to lay down potential bridges with those of the host society.

Generally speaking, making cultural references and comparisons with those of the host country encourages participation and helps make links during mediation situations.

**Social mediation** (Luison & Valastro 2004) also offers interesting avenues. Complementary to social work, the skills developed in social mediation are specific to situations of social tension. They promote the creation or consolidation of cooperation, by finding compromises between the "mediatees," in order to avoid, for example, systematically calling on law enforcement agencies. These skills are based both on a professional background and social work training and on skills and a life history that confer a better grasp of the issues at the origin of the conflict, and allow the mediatee to identify with the mediator and develop a bond of trust.

For example, some museums and cultural institutions with coexistence issues have opened up social mediation positions to create meeting points between users and promote the inclusion of homeless or vulnerable people who frequent or use their establishments. Projects carried out in this context may use the cultural or heritage object as a starting point or pretext for connecting individuals within or between social groups. Hence, knowledge of social mediation, and especially of conflict management, can be useful in order to avoid or properly respond to conflict situations that may arise within and beyond the walls of the museum.

The "toolbox" can also be informed by other practices closer to socio-cultural intervention, whether pre-existing, emerging or parallel to cultural mediation: **popular education**,<sup>4</sup> **community development via cultural activities or artistic initiatives**,<sup>5</sup> **amateur artistic practice**,<sup>6</sup> **intellectual mediation**,<sup>7</sup> **art therapy and adapted art**,<sup>8</sup> **community art** (Chagnon & Neumark 2011), etc. These currents are not systematically part of public social or cultural policies. They sometimes take the form of professional bodies, occupations and practices. They may also be an area of vocational, college or university training, or feature as the chief mandate of certain organizations.

.....  
4 The Centre de documentation sur l'éducation des adultes et la condition féminine notes the existence of various definitions of popular education, which is continually evolving. It can be summed up as "any form of adult education outside traditional academic settings" (<http://cdeacf.ca/dossier/education-populaire-autonome>, translated freely).

5 Field of intervention for which training is offered at Université du Québec à Montréal (<https://etudier.uqam.ca/programme?code=4154>).

6 Amateur artistic practice is defined and supported by the Ville de Montréal (<https://ville.montreal.qc.ca/cultureloisir/fichiers/2019/02/des-prog-pratique-artistique-amateur-2019-2020.pdf>).

7 Practice developed by the Exeko organization ([https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BzOepHp-C\\_YgU3E3YU95TFcyQ0E/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BzOepHp-C_YgU3E3YU95TFcyQ0E/view)).

8 A program of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens gives a definition of dance therapy and related activities. (<https://grandsballets.com/en/national-centre-for-dance-therapy/about-the-centre/>).

They may be adopted as a set of relational or intervention techniques, or as a general orientation in the practices of certain professionals.

It is important to clarify that the cultural mediator is never expected to assume the role of social worker. It is recommended to work closely with the various experts before, during and after the activities. In addition, a better knowledge of audiences requires some understanding of the approaches they have adopted. Some upgrading training may be helpful in this respect.

### ← Off-site particularities →

Include a **reference person from the group**, or even discuss the interest of proposing the activity as a special moment involving several members of the work team.

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Mediator(s)

See if the mediation topic or strategies employed are linked to recurring activities in the group. If so, invite **the people in the organization responsible for these activities**.

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Mediator(s)

## 3.2 Reception

Make sure that everyone at the admission, and indeed all museum staff—including volunteers and room supervisors—**is able to welcome, guide and respond to the specific needs of the audiences**.

Museum

*The approach must be inclusive, emphasizing openness, listening and respect for individuals' self-determination. It is crucial that these people know how to welcome different audiences, and be familiar with the premises' accessibility (accessible toilets, elevators, etc.) and any tools or services that might be useful (special visit guides, quieter spaces in case of anxiety attacks, places to sit, etc.).*

*Given the frequently high staff turnover, it is strongly advised either to offer regular training or to create a guide with clear principles (to be revised regularly).*

While this may seem like a detail, greeting participants is essential and can make the difference between someone appreciating or disliking their experience, or even whether they come back to the museum.

Anticipate that audiences **may be smaller or participate less than expected**.

*In spite of prior preparation, social-sector audiences are participating on a voluntary basis, and issues can come up for many people; some may be absent or only sporadically present, and their focus and involvement may vary. Those involved must make do with the number of people who do show up, their energy on that day, their ability and drive to be proactive or not, etc. Moreover, in spite of communications with the reference persons in the groups, the profile of those present may not completely match what was anticipated.*

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person

### ← Off-site particularities →

Begin by having the **mediation team formally or informally introduced** to the members by the reference person, who will be able to break the ice and situate the activity within the group's unique context.

Reference person

## 3.3 Attention to comfort

Begin by explaining **the activity's goals and how it will unfold**, as well as the implicit rules of a museum tour. [Mediator(s)]

Mediator(s)

Make sure to warn everyone if **certain elements might affect the sensitivity of visitors**, i.e., if some things spark strong emotions or involve noise or bright lights that can make it difficult to see and hear, etc.

Mediator(s)

**“Of all cultural spaces, museums are often the favourite for autistic people; they’re usually quieter.”**

(Activist and worker, disabled sector – neurodiversity)

Make sure that the environment outside the activity is relatively **calm and not too noisy**.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

Clarify how anyone wishing to do so can choose **not to participate** (remain silent, leave the group for a self-guided visit, choose not to participate in a participatory work, etc.), or even withdraw for a time, for example, by going to the bathroom or to a dedicated quiet space, such as a calm room with low sensory stimulation.

Mediator(s)

Be attentive to the **physical effort and concentration** of the participants and provide breaks if necessary.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person

Plan for **beverages and a snack**, as well as free time for discretionary activities (such as smoking).

Mediator(s)

*This is a tradition in the activities of community and non-profit organizations, and a consideration that participants expect!*

*As for snacks, be careful of allergies, and make sure eating and drinking containers and utensils are friendly for everyone (among other things, straws are recommended).*

### 3.4 Carrying out a cultural mediation activity

**Good preparation, flexibility** and the ability to let go are all important in order to be well equipped and have the confidence required.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

*The activity is for the participants! It is important to listen to the participants and follow their pace, albeit without losing sight of the time allotted for the activity. It is the process, and not the result, that matters most.*

*During the action research, none of the guided tours (on or off-site) went as planned, and each unfolded differently...*

**Adapt formats and content to the participants in attendance**, while making sure certain key ideas are conveyed.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

*This entails selecting content and strategies according to group dynamics, accepting that not everything that was planned may be seen (avoid saying too much), and even discussing exhibition-related elements that were not addressed.*

**Open up space for discussion**, and even for disagreement, while upholding respect for everyone. A polyphony of perspectives and discourse is fundamental here.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

**“In their relationship to the exhibit, people should be subjects, not just objects that come to receive something.”**

(Worker, immigration sector)

If possible, promote **co-mediation activities** where various people can share the floor in a fluid manner.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person, participants

*Obviously, for museums, this idea of co-mediation entails additional costs. It is quite rare to have more than one mediator, and the various specialists often also need to be paid. That said, some ad hoc resources, particularly university resources, may be free. This co-mediation can also be attempted with the activity participants themselves, especially if the topics addressed concern them directly. This may, however, require advance preparation with some of them. It will also be easier if the activity is developed over the course of various meetings.*

## Co-mediation

While the mediator(s) must be the ones in charge, the activity can also be informed by other people, i.e., an artist, researchers, inspiring members from the community, participants, etc. However, the tasks must be clearly defined and distributed.

This fluidity opens different windows on the exhibition, allows the expression of different views, and provides relevant answers to participant questions and comments.

It is important to be sensitive to issues of expertise and hierarchy. These other individuals should not be there to put themselves forward, but to respond to (and with) the group. They must also forgo the distance of observation and instead be actively involved, bringing chairs for people to sit in, speaking with participants, helping to pass around works or objects, etc.

The literature often indicates the need to be careful about the number of experts in relation to the number of participants. While this dimension does call for reflection, it was not an issue in our action research. Beyond numbers, what is decisive is people's ability to work together, to be attentive to the participants and, after having clearly identified themselves, to become participants in the activity.

## ← Off-site particularities →

**Emphasize co-mediation even more** in this context, especially to reinforce the connection between the activity and the group.

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Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person, participants

Make sure, in the mediation, **to make links** with the premises and how they are used.

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Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person

Expect to welcome and deal with **potentially more personal and emotional self-expression** from participants.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

*Community and non-profit groups are often living environments and therefore conducive to more intimate, less inhibited expression.*

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## 4

## Wrapping up the activity

Conduct an **activity evaluation** (Appendix 4, p. 138) with the participants.

*This evaluation must be voluntary, but also carried out in different ways: collectively and individually, verbal and in writing. These instruments must respect the form of expression preferred by the different participants, as well as their capacities.*

*This conversation with the participants about their experience is a key moment in the mediation process; it makes it easier to give new meaning to individuals' lived experience, while also offering support to those wishing to express themselves. This step encourages the expression of a form of solidarity in the group and can be very beneficial to the persons in attendance.*

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

Take a step back after each mediation to **share views on your experience** and identify strengths and weaknesses, see if adjustments are needed, and simply clear your mind and recharge your batteries, since mediation can be demanding and emotionally charged.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

Plan a **review with the groups involved**, through the reference person. It should include thanks and a debriefing, both by the group (for the museum) and by the mediators.

Mediator(s), reference person

Consider whether it is appropriate to **offer participants something related to the activity** as a souvenir of their experience.

The mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, members of the collaborative structure

### ← Off-site particularities →

Return the premises to the state they were in upon arrival.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

If appropriate, offer participants free admissions to the museum, or even prepare groups for a museum tour if the off-site activities are part of a broader program of activities both within and beyond the museum.

Mediator(s)

## 5

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