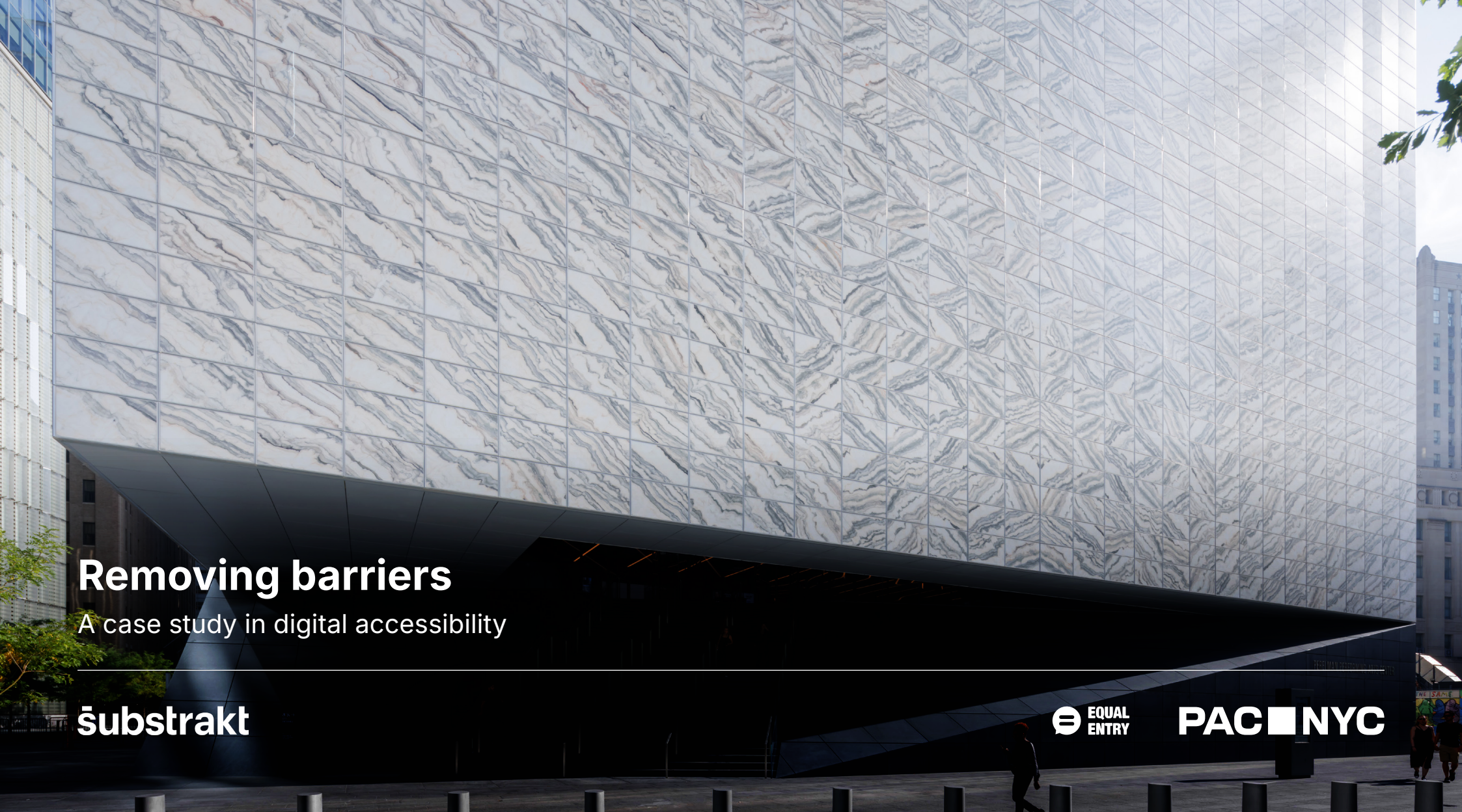

Removing barriers

A case study in digital accessibility

substrakt

EQUAL ENTRY

PAC NYC

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Accessibility is not a project.
It takes work, time, and an ongoing approach to do it right.
It’s not something you do once and you’re done – it’s something that must be continuous.

Photo: Iwan Baan

Aim of this paper

A co-authored paper from Substrakt and Equal Entry.

Substrakt is a digital agency specializing in the arts and culture sector. They have over 80 clients across Europe and North America, delivering websites, digital products, and a range of consultancy services.

Equal Entry is a digital accessibility consultancy focused on results. They are fluent in the most current international accessibility standards, and focus on helping their clients develop technology that people with disabilities can use.

This paper demonstrates the immense value of creating accessible digital experiences, for both organizations and their users.

Using the Perelman Performing Arts Center (PAC NYC) as a best practice case study, Substrakt and Equal Entry highlight the common challenges faced by access users online and share their solutions, recommendations, and guidance.

Substrakt and Equal Entry have worked together with PAC NYC to ensure that the PAC NYC website and purchase path is as accessible as possible. This project took place from 2023 to 2024.

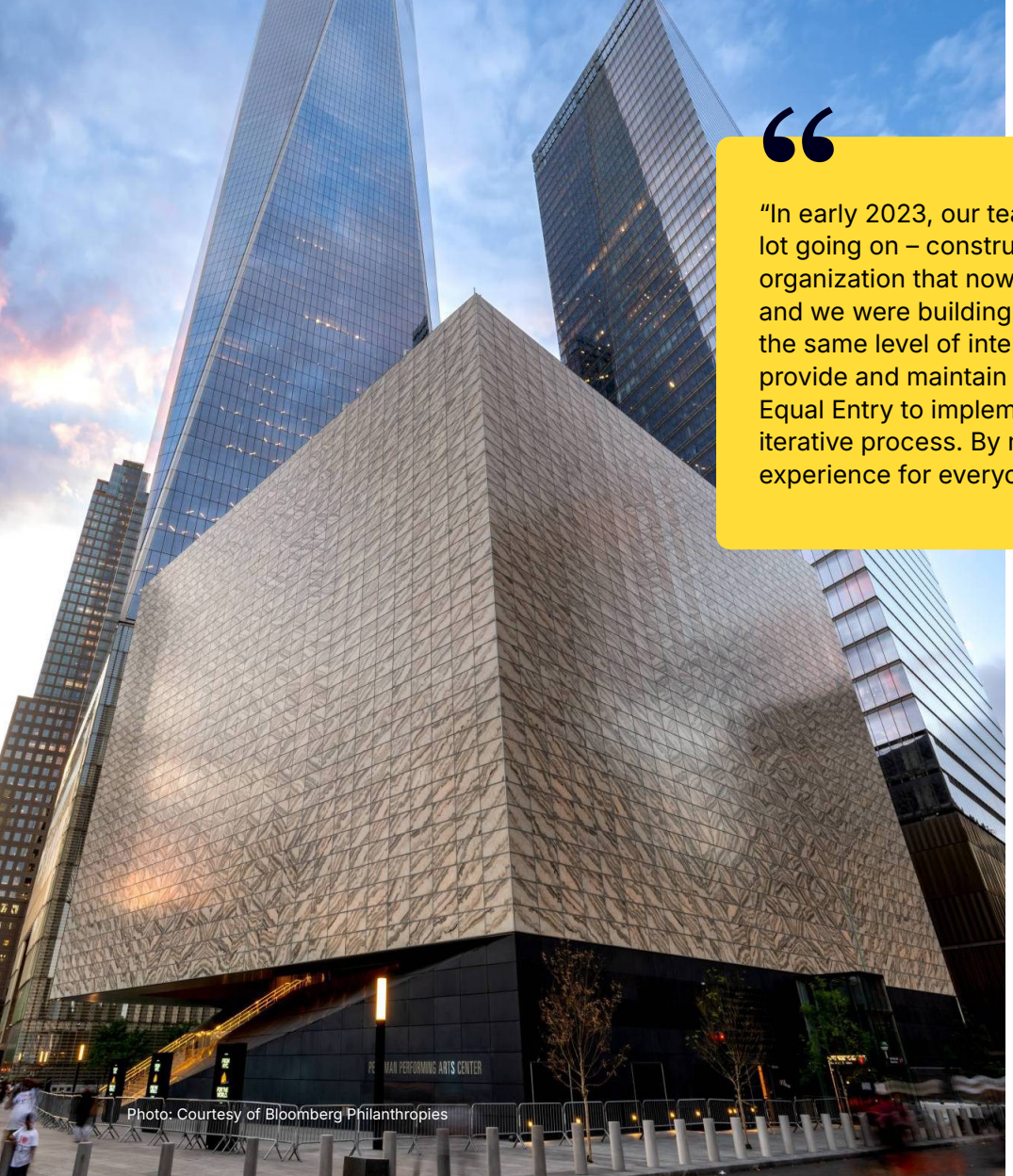

Photo: Courtesy of Bloomberg Philanthropies

> “In early 2023, our team was hard at work helping build PAC NYC. There was a lot going on – construction was well underway, we were rapidly recruiting for the organization that now runs it, our Artistic team was preparing the opening shows and we were building our website from scratch. Our digital presence required the same level of intentionality and care as our physical environment. In order to provide and maintain an accessible experience, we partnered with Substrakt and Equal Entry to implement best practices and incorporate accessibility reviews in our iterative process. By making accessibility an explicit goal, we’ve delivered a better experience for everyone.”
>
> **– Leo Bowen, Digital Product Manager at PAC NYC**

PAC NYC is a multi-space performing arts center at the northeast corner of the World Trade Center complex in Manhattan, New York City.

In 2023, they launched a brand new website following a new partnership with Substrakt. In addition to building PAC NYC’s new marketing site, Substrakt also implemented a new online purchase pathway solution to take users through the checkout flow and process ticket purchases. The solution, called Viadukt by Substrakt, needed to be as accessible as the marketing website to ensure a seamless and usable end-to-end customer experience.

In October 2023, PAC NYC commissioned Equal Entry to conduct an audit of their new digital infrastructure.

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Part 1

Introduction

Digital accessibility refers to making a product, service or environment usable to as wide a range of capabilities as possible.

The importance of digital accessibility

Accessibility is a crucial component of any successful digital experience. Not only does it allow us to increase reach and diversify our audiences but also it improves usability for everyone.

Users engage with cultural organizations at a variety of touchpoints. The online interaction with their website is one of the most prominent. So, the more people that can use a cultural organization's website – and as a result purchase tickets, memberships, and donations – the greater the revenue opportunities.

In this paper, we will focus on a selection of user journeys from PAC NYC's website to demonstrate how and where access issues can arise.

Browse shows	**Select a show, date, and seat**
Purchase tickets	**Make a donation**
Contact	**View FAQs**

While these scenarios are specifically related to the offer of a performing arts organization, the accessibility challenges apply to any cultural organization's website.

For example, you will find that the issue we identified for "Exploring shows" could easily be found if a user was looking to find more information about an exhibition, festival, or conference.

Equal Entry conducted their audit by following these user journeys and identifying any accessibility issues. These were then fed into Substrakt to address each issue.

Using these six user journeys, we will:

Problem

Outline the issues identified in Equal Entry's audit

Solution

Explain how Substrakt fixed them

Tip

Offer a tip for applying the learnings to other projects

“

It was extremely important for us to build accessibility work into the website development process from the start. As a brand-new organization with a new building, we felt that it was our responsibility to follow best practices from the start, the same way we did with physical accessibility at our building.

Faced with very aggressive deadlines, we agreed on a phased approach that would allow us to launch critical aspects of our website ahead of opening. By evaluating the work for accessibility during the website development process, we were able to get ahead of some issues before all the phases were completed, and accessibility feedback went directly into later development phases.

– Vlado Vince, Former Director of Information Technology at PAC NYC

Part 2

Executive summary

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Photo courtesy of Bloomberg Philanthropies

A cultural space rooted in accessibility

PAC NYC is more than a new performing arts center – it's a symbol of access, diversity and innovation. From the start, they set out to ensure its website reflected these same values. Accessibility wasn't treated as an afterthought or a compliance task, it was part of the foundation.

Uncovering usability challenges

To support this goal, PAC NYC partnered with Equal Entry to conduct a thorough accessibility audit of its website. The audit revealed several areas where users relying on assistive technologies – such as screen readers or keyboard navigation – faced friction when exploring performances, purchasing tickets, or making donations.

These challenges weren't just technical, they were usability issues that impacted real people. By addressing them, PAC NYC aimed to improve the overall experience for everyone.

Providing a better user experience

The fixes implemented by Substrakt were both thoughtful and pragmatic. From adding screen-reader-only labels to show listings to improving keyboard focus inside modal windows, every change made the site more navigable, intuitive, and inclusive.

The team also restructured link text for better context, introduced clearer heading hierarchies, and ensured that users could easily select donation amounts and FAQ entries using just a keyboard.

A phased and flexible approach

PAC NYC approached the project with realistic timelines and a flexible mindset. The site launched in phases to align with the opening of the building itself, allowing the team to learn, iterate, and build accessibility into each stage of the rollout.

This phased strategy allowed them to prioritize ticket sales early on, gather user feedback, and fold those insights into future updates – without compromising on inclusive design.

Accessibility as an ongoing practice

One of the most important lessons from this process was that accessibility isn't a one-time fix. It's a commitment to continuous improvement. PAC NYC has since embedded accessibility into its content workflows, audit processes, and future planning.

Whether it's adding questions to support accessible seating during checkout, refining link text on older pages, or ensuring image alt text is meaningful and accurate across the site, the work continues.

Part 3

Context

Photo courtesy of Bloomberg Philanthropies

In this paper

It is important to note that this paper covers a specific segment of access relating to assistive technology. Because PAC NYC's website and purchase path were at a high level of accessibility when Equal Entry conducted the audit, the subsequent work focused on improving more complex access issues for screen reader and keyboard users.

As such, this paper does not address some of the broader challenges access users often encounter online, such as colour, text size, the dimensions of clickable elements, and language.

These are hugely important factors that need to be considered when making your website and other digital products accessible. There are lots of resources available on both Substrakt and Equal Entry's website to guide you through these.

Compliance and beyond

This paper references the Web Accessibility Content Guidelines (WCAG). This is a set of standards that aim to make digital content more inclusive, accessible and usable.

The examples used in this paper are based on WCAG guidelines, as they offer a widely accepted framework for digital accessibility. However, it's important to recognize the limitations of relying solely on these guidelines.

Some organizations approach WCAG compliance as a tick-box exercise, meeting the minimum technical standards without fully addressing real user needs. Accessibility isn't just about passing audits. It's about creating usable, inclusive experiences, which often requires going beyond what WCAG specifies through user testing, ongoing feedback, and a deeper commitment to inclusive design.

A word on focus rectangles

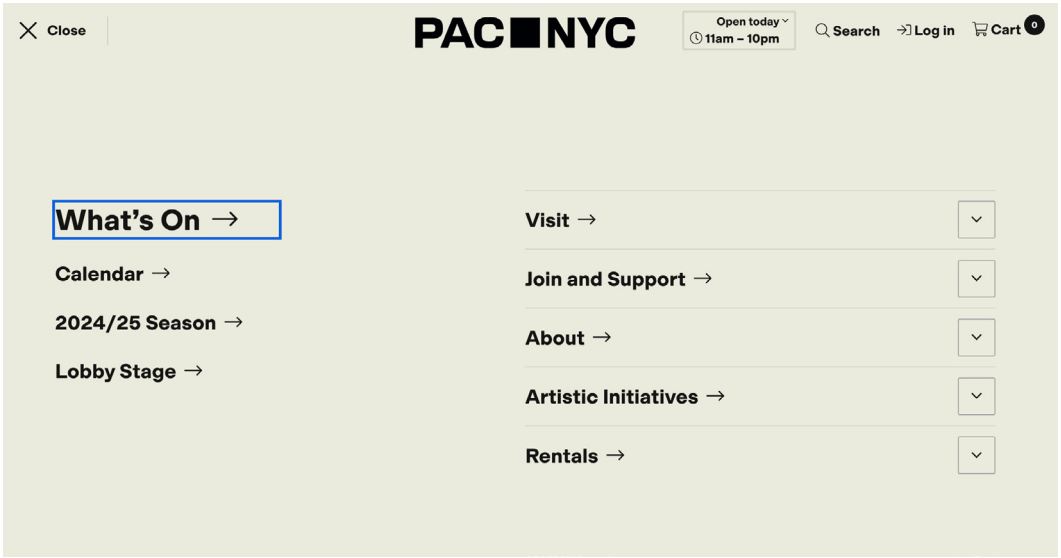
Focus rectangles (or indicators) are frequently referenced throughout this paper.

A focus rectangle allows keyboard users to see exactly where they are on any given page.

Keyboard users typically navigate their way through websites by pressing the Tab key. This allows them to move from one element of the page to another (such as a heading, button or link, etc).

The focus indicator highlights which element of the page they are on. Without it, keyboard users wouldn't be able to navigate through the page and move along their desired journey.

Our reference to this will show how and where subtle improvements to the focus indication of a website can make a big difference to accessibility and the overall user experience.



Example of a focus rectangle in action. The megamenu of the PAC NYC website is open, with the focus rectangle around What's on.

“The focus indicator is to keyboard users what the mouse cursor is to mouse users. And just like you would never want to hide the mouse cursor, you never want to hide the focus indicator.”

– Sara Soueidan, Inclusive Design Engineer

Understanding the roots of accessibility challenges

Even in thoughtfully designed, user-centered projects like this, gaps can emerge simply because accessibility standards continue to evolve, and the ways people interact with digital products varies widely. This makes collaboration, testing and iteration essential. The partnership between Substrakt, Equal Entry and PAC NYC aimed to do just that – to surface and solve issues through shared expertise.

Part 4

User journeys

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Photo: Iwan Baan

User journey 1:

Select a seat

When buying tickets to a show, finding a seat that meets the individual's needs is crucial to the decision-making process. A user's criteria may include things like the price of a seat, where the seat is situated in the venue, whether the seat is wheelchair accessible and so on. So, the user needs to feel confident they've picked the right seat during the process before they checkout and pay for the ticket.

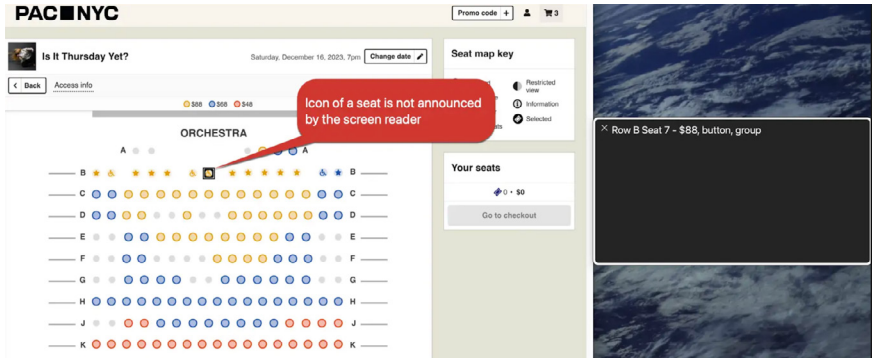
This can be one of the biggest challenges faced by someone using a screen reader as these interfaces are often visually dense and complex – information that is often not well or meaningfully translated for users who are using non-visual methods to navigate the page.

The problem

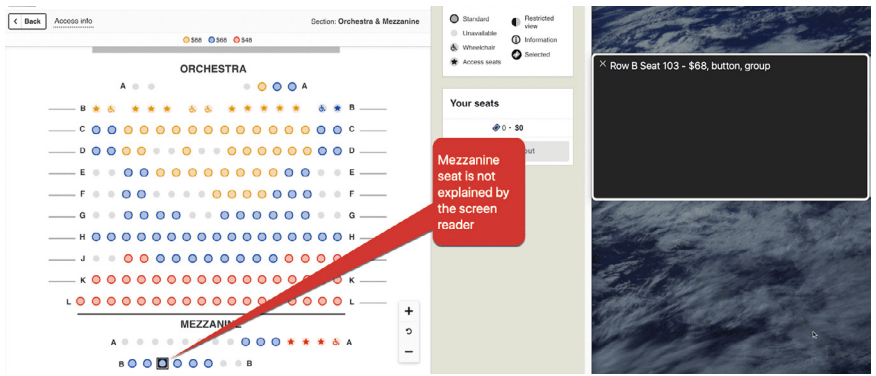
Despite the relatively high accessibility of PAC NYC's online ticket-buying journey, Equal Entry's audit highlighted an issue during the seat selection process.

The screen reader did not announce the icons that indicated the status of specific seats, so the only way to distinguish one seat from another was visually.

The screen reader only announced the row, seat number, and price, so the user didn't know what type of seat was being described, whether it's wheelchair, access, restricted view, companion seat and so on.



Example of an issue where the seat map key was not associated with the visual image for the screen reader user



Example of an issue where the Mezzanine seat was not explained to a screen reader

The solution

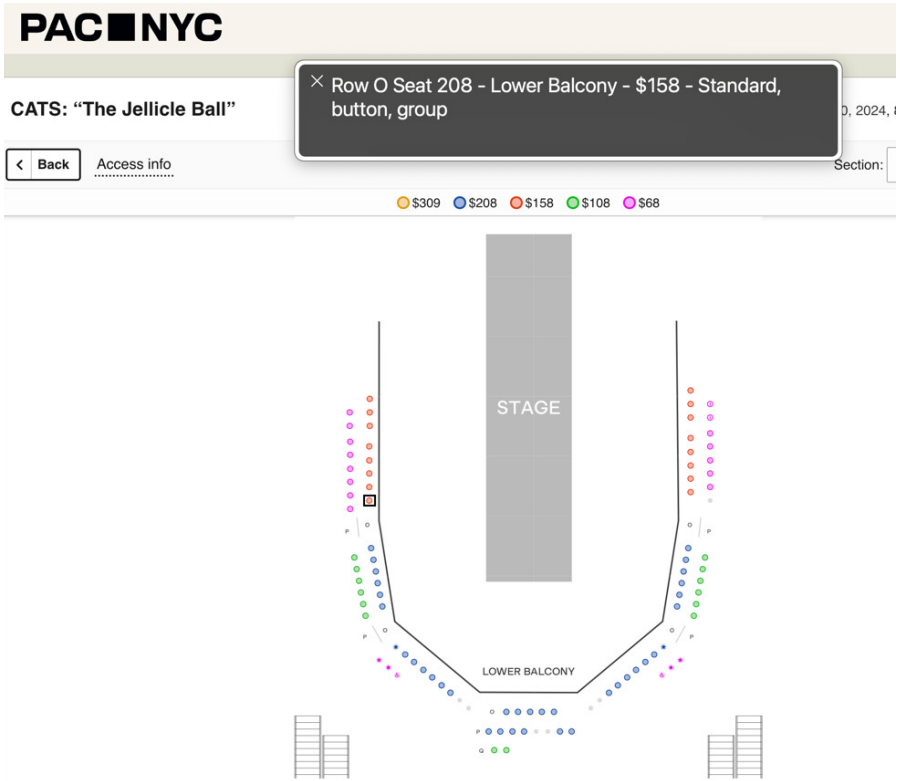
The fix was simple. We needed to improve the seat titles to provide accurate and detailed information to someone using a screen reader.

Following extensive discussions about the order of the information presented, we came up with a solution to make it quick and easy for someone to know what type of seat is selected.

The information that is now announced by the screen reader follows a format mirroring “Row A Seat 1 - PAC NYC - $129 - Pay-what-you-wish $15 - $120 - Companion Seats”.

By making the seat titles more descriptive and structured in a consistent, clear format, we vastly improved the ability of screen reader users to make informed decisions during the seat selection process.

For PAC NYC, this will likely result in fewer abandonment baskets and an enhanced sense of trust amongst their users.



Example of the improved seat titles. The seat highlighted is titled Row O Seat 208 – Lower Balcony – $158 – Standard, button, group.

Tip

It is important to design text alternatives for complex visualizations such as a seat map in a thoughtful way. Listening to a description with the ears versus scanning text with the eyes is a linear process. This means that the most important and unique information for a text alternative should come at the beginning of the string.

Consistency is also key - ensuring that all seat titles follow the same format allows users to quickly adapt to the pattern and process their choices more efficiently.

Small but thoughtful changes like this not only enhance the experience for screen reader users, but they also ensure that all users - regardless of their method of interaction - can navigate your content in a way that feels intuitive and clear.

As a broader principle, the goal is to ensure that non-visual users can interact with your website as seamlessly as visual users, by prioritizing clarity and accessibility in your text descriptions.

User journey 2:

Explore shows

Exploring upcoming performances is often one of the most engaging and exciting parts of visiting a cultural organization's website. For PAC NYC, this happens primarily through the "What's On" page. This is a central hub where users browse shows, learn more about them and purchase tickets. It's a key touchpoint that should feel intuitive and informative for all users, regardless of how they interact with the site.

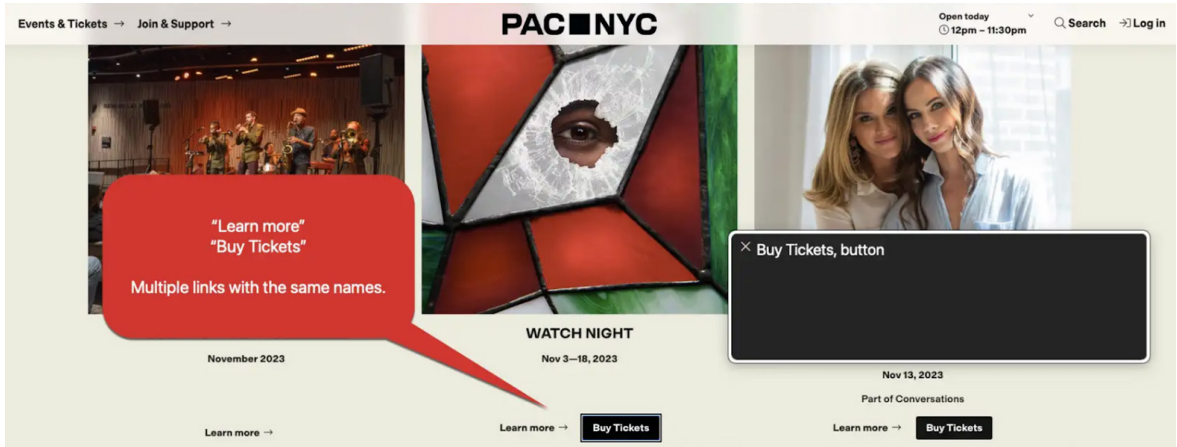
For sighted users, the experience is relatively seamless, but for users who rely on screen readers, this process posed a frustrating challenge that had a big impact on usability.

The problem

On PAC NYC's "What's On" page, each show listing includes two key links: "Buy Tickets" and "Learn More." These calls to action are essential for users looking to explore a performance in more detail or secure a ticket.

However, the accessibility audit revealed a major issue for screen reader users. While these links were visually placed beneath the appropriate show, their context wasn't conveyed through the screen reader. Instead of hearing something like "Learn more about [insert show name," users simply heard "Learn more" or "Buy tickets" - without any indication of which show the link referred to.

Because screen reader users navigate the page linearly and often skim links independently of surrounding content, this lack of context made the browsing experience confusing and inefficient. Users couldn't confidently select a link without guessing or backtracking to piece together the necessary information.



Example of the old button issues underneath PAC NYC's event listings.
The buttons say "Learn more" and "Buy tickets" without context of the show for screen reader users.

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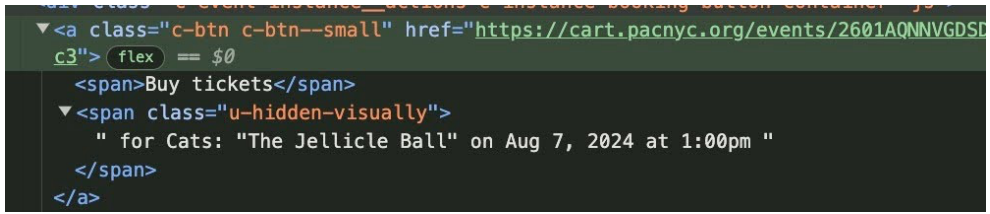
The solution

To fix it, we added some information to the code of the website that's not visible to people looking at the screen - information in the site's backend that allows screen readers to announce a longer description for the tickets.

Under the line of code for "Buy ticket" or "Learn more," there are two additional lines that make this possible. The first contains "`u-hidden-visually`." This tells the next line that it needs to be hidden from the person looking at the screen. In other words, it can only be seen or heard by people seeing or hearing the code.

The line that follows then contains the show information. For example, "`for Cats: The Jellicle Ball" on Aug 7, 2024 at 1:00pm` " means screen readers can access this additional information. This information won't be displayed to visual users on the website.



Example of the code containing the show's name, hidden from the frontend of the site.

Thanks to this fix, someone navigating with a screen reader knows exactly which show they're buying tickets for or learning more about.

The link that before read "Learn More" is now read "Learn More about Watch Night" or "Learn More about CATS".

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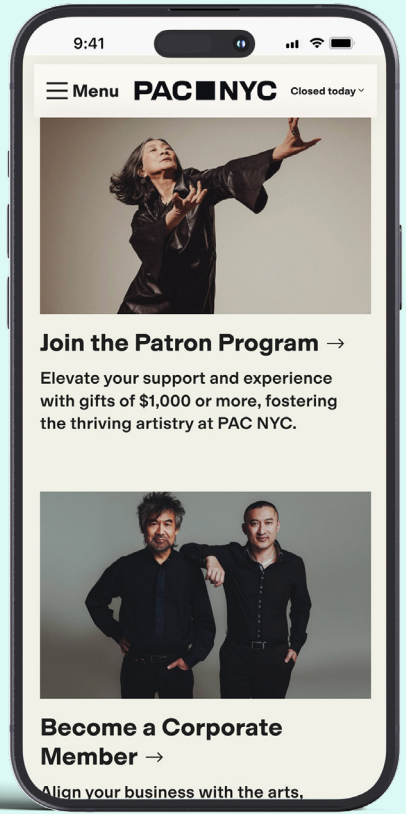


A screen on the PAC NYC website encouraging member donations, shown on a mobile device

Tip

Our solution here was a slightly more complex change from a development perspective, but it speaks to a broader point that everyone can put into practice without being technical – link text descriptions.

These are crucial for accessibility, particularly for users who rely on screen readers or other assistive technologies. Well-crafted link text provides context about the destination or function of the link without requiring the user to read surrounding content.

Vague phrases like “click here” or “read more” can be confusing, as they give no indication of what will happen when the link is activated. Instead, descriptive link text allows users to quickly understand the purpose of the link, improving navigation and making the web more inclusive. This is especially important for users with visual disabilities, cognitive disabilities, or motor disabilities, who benefit significantly from concise, meaningful labels that help them interact with content more effectively.

User journey 3:

Purchase tickets

After a user has explored a performance and selected their seat, the next logical step is completing their ticket purchase. This part of the journey should feel as seamless and efficient as possible. This is especially true for users who rely on assistive technologies.

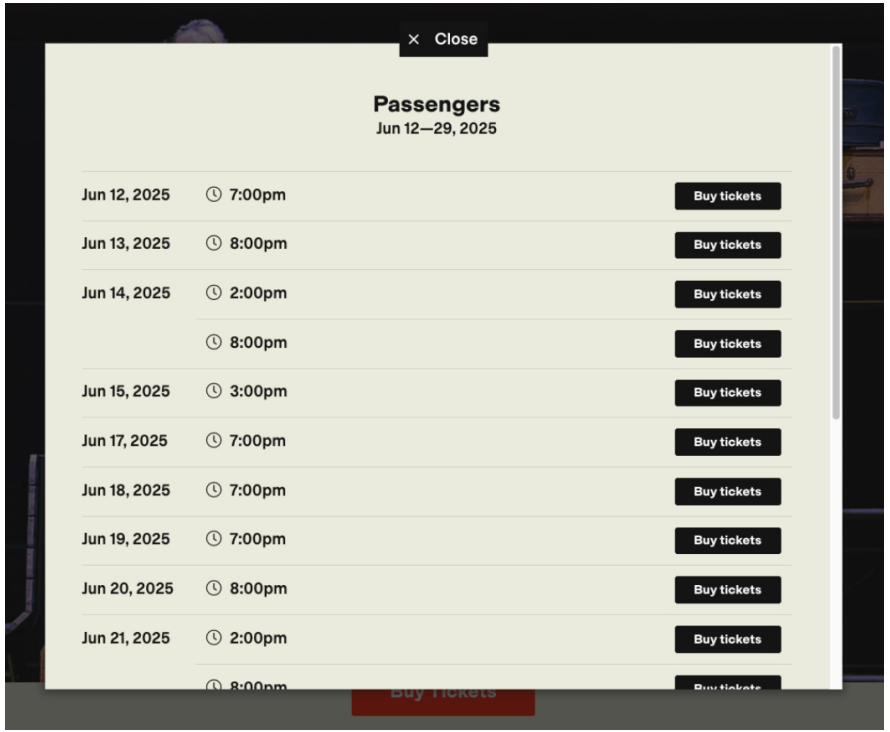
For many people with disabilities, using a mouse or touchpad isn't an option. They may navigate a website using only a keyboard, voice commands or a switch device (a switch device is a tool used to operate assistive technology, especially for individuals who find it challenging to use touchscreens, computer mice or keyboards. Devices like mouse buttons and keyboard keys are examples of switches). If key tasks like selecting a performance date aren't optimized for non-mouse input, a user can quickly become stuck or overwhelmed. In the case of PAC NYC's site, this was exactly the barrier that Equal Entry's accessibility audit uncovered.

The problem

On the PAC NYC website, when users click “Buy tickets” for a specific show, a dialog box appears listing all the available dates for that show.

Not all users navigate a website with a mouse; some rely solely on a keyboard or other input device, like a switch, to move through a site.

The issue discovered by the audit was that when this dialog box opened, the keyboard focus did not automatically move to the first available date. Instead, keyboard-only users had to press the Tab key repeatedly – sometimes 30, 40, or even 50 times – to reach the desired date, making the process extremely cumbersome.



Example of the dialog box that appears after clicking “Buy tickets” on the PAC NYC website, showing multiple performance dates, but without proper keyboard focus meaning excessive tabbing is required to reach them.

The solution

To resolve the focus issue in the modal pop-up (also known as a dialog), Substrakt added a focus trap that automatically moves the keyboard focus to the first available date as soon as the dialog opens. This means users no longer have to press the Tab key many times to get to the important content inside the modal.

We also added extra logic to make sure this behavior works every time the dialog loads, even if it appears or reloads without refreshing the whole page. These changes significantly improve keyboard navigation and align with accessibility best practices.

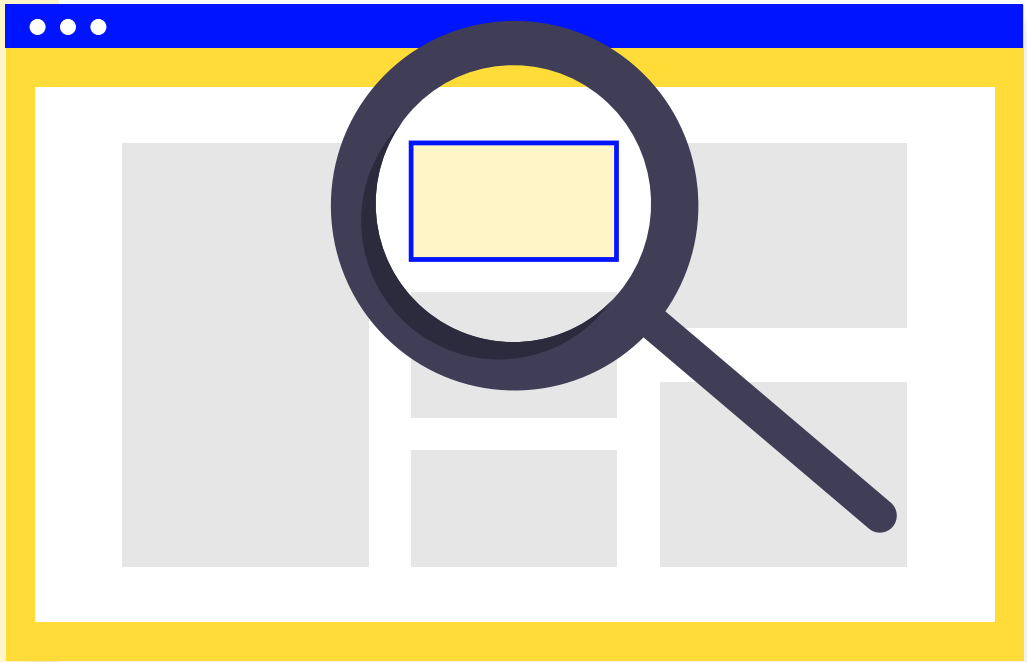


Illustration of a webpage with a highlighted focus box and
a magnifying glass emphasizing keyboard focus on interactive elements

Tip

Accessibility isn't just about whether someone can complete a task. It's also about how easily and efficiently they can do it. Every time a user has to press the Tab key to navigate to the next interactive element, they're investing time and effort. While a sighted user with a mouse can scan and click within seconds, a keyboard-only user may spend minutes navigating the same interface.

As a general guideline:

One Tab press may take 0.5 seconds for a typical keyboard user.

For someone using assistive tech like a switch device, it could take 1 to 2 seconds per Tab.

Multiply that by 30 or more Tab stops, and a simple interaction becomes a barrier.

You create a more equitable experience by minimizing unnecessary Tab stops and thoughtfully managing keyboard focus. This is especially the case when modal windows or dialogs open. Optimizing for efficiency is optimizing for inclusion.

User journey 4:

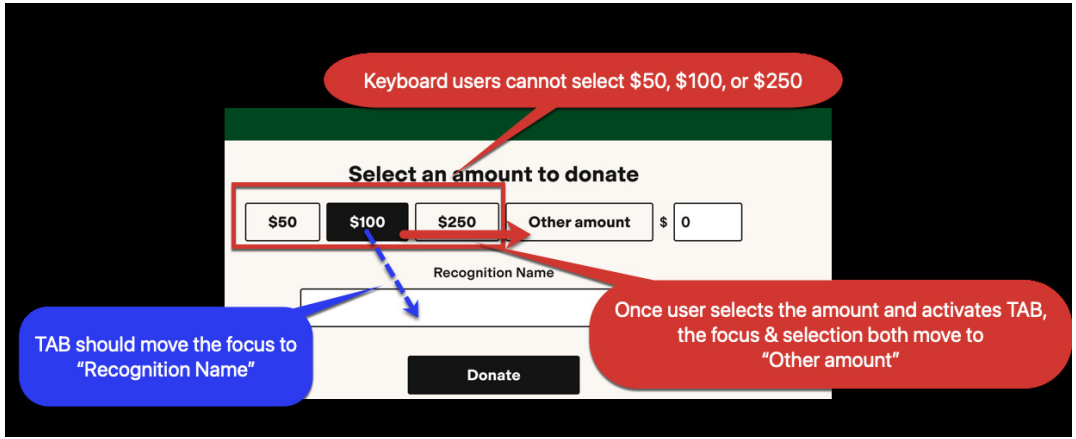
Make a donation

Donations are an important revenue stream for cultural organisations, so making sure people can donate quickly and easily is really important.

The problem

Before making accessibility improvements, keyboard users had a hard time selecting a predefined donation amount on the PAC NYC website. The interface appeared to offer several quick-select amounts, such as $25, $50, or $100. However, if you weren't using a mouse, those options were inaccessible.

When a keyboard user selected a predefined amount and pressed the Tab key, the focus jumped to the "Other amount" input field, even though a fixed value had been selected. This not only created confusion but also overrode their selection, effectively forcing them to enter a custom amount instead.



Example of the journey a keyboard user had when trying to select a predefined donation value on the site

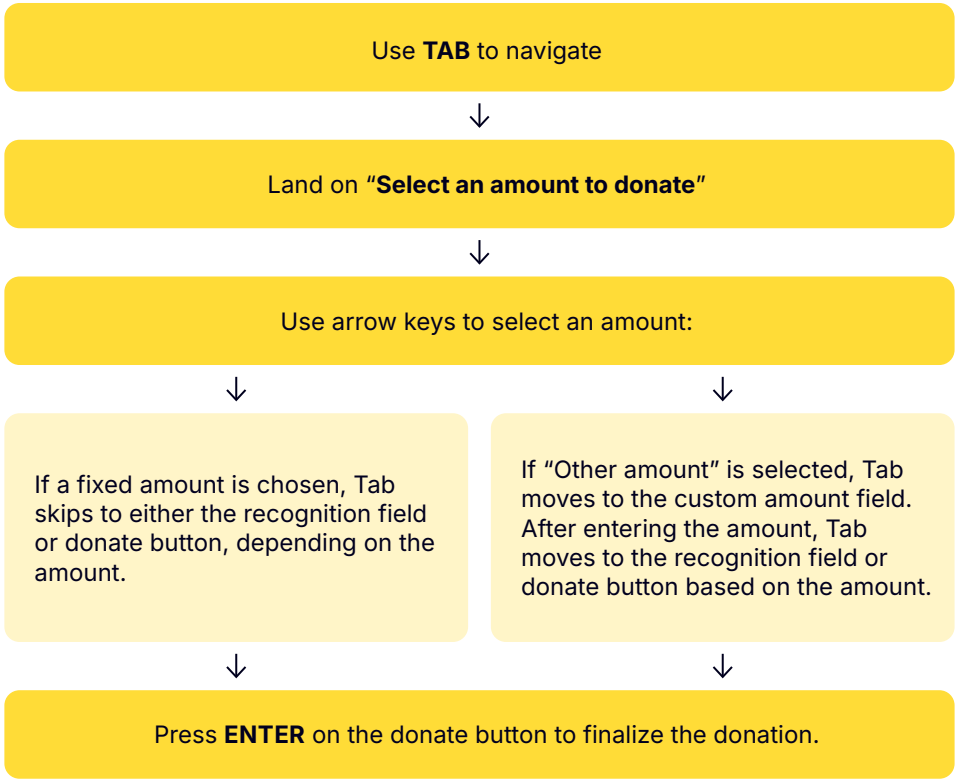
In short, the default keyboard navigation flow unintentionally funnelled users into the "Other amount" path, even when they had tried to choose a preset donation. This added an unnecessary barrier for non-mouse users.

The solution

The browser or assistive technology identifies interactive elements as a list. Keyboard users can navigate through them using Tab (next) or Shift+Tab (previous). For certain elements like radio buttons and dropdowns, arrow keys are needed for further navigation.

The $$$ buttons and the “Other amount” button function as a group of radio buttons, allowing only one selection, either by clicking or using arrow keys. The custom amount field activates only when “Other amount” is selected. For mouse users, clicking the custom field auto-selects “Other amount,” but this caused issues for keyboard users, who couldn’t easily access preset amounts.

The ideal keyboard navigation should follow this sequence:



The solution

Example of the updated Support page on the PAC NYC website, mocked up on a laptop device.

Before the fix, keyboard users selecting a fixed amount were redirected to the custom amount field, unintentionally switching to “Other amount”. This prevented them from skipping to the donate button and kept reverting to custom input.

We resolved this by disabling focus on the custom amount field unless “Other amount” was selected, allowing users to Tab through preset amounts smoothly.

Tip

If your website offers quick-select options – whether it's for donations, ticket prices or filter categories – make sure keyboard users can interact with them just as efficiently as mouse users.

Best practices to keep in mind:

Ensure that keyboard focus moves logically through the form, and avoid traps that force users into unrelated fields.

Disable or hide elements that shouldn't be interacted with unless selected (e.g., custom input fields that only apply under specific conditions).

Maintain consistency in interaction patterns. If users learn how to select options using arrow keys in one section, don't switch to a different pattern elsewhere in the form. Repetition and predictability are key to reducing cognitive load and supporting assistive technology users across the entire experience.

An accessible donation form doesn't just make giving possible – **it makes giving easy**.

User journey 5:

FAQs

FAQs are a valuable resource for cultural organizations, offering quick answers to common questions. Because these sections can grow long, it's important to design them in a way that makes them easy to scan and navigate – especially for people using assistive technologies and those who get overwhelmed with a lot of text on a page.

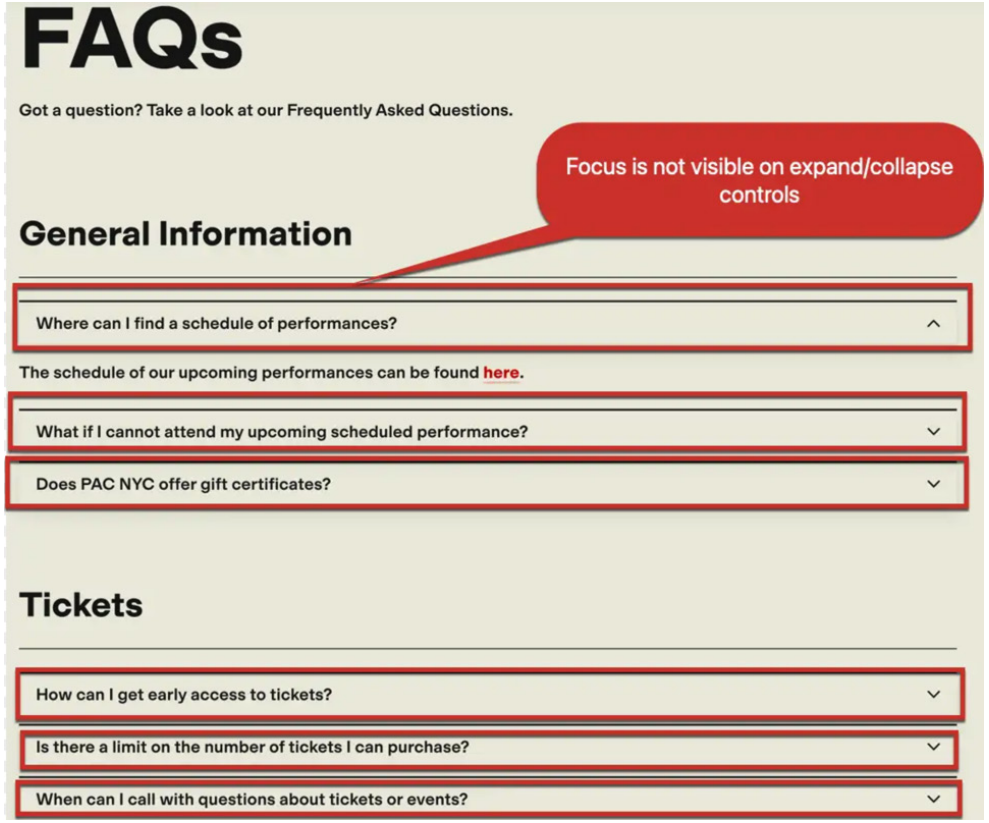
PAC NYC's FAQ section was built using an accordion-style interaction. Users could click on a question to reveal the answer, and click again to collapse it. This format helps reduce visual clutter. The interface must provide enough feedback to help those navigating via keyboard or a screen reader know where they are on the page.

For example, someone navigating by keyboard should be able to Tab through the list of questions, clearly identify which question is currently in focus, and choose whether or not to expand it.

The problem

When keyboard users navigated the FAQ section of the site using the Tab key, they couldn't see which question was selected because there was no visible focus rectangle.

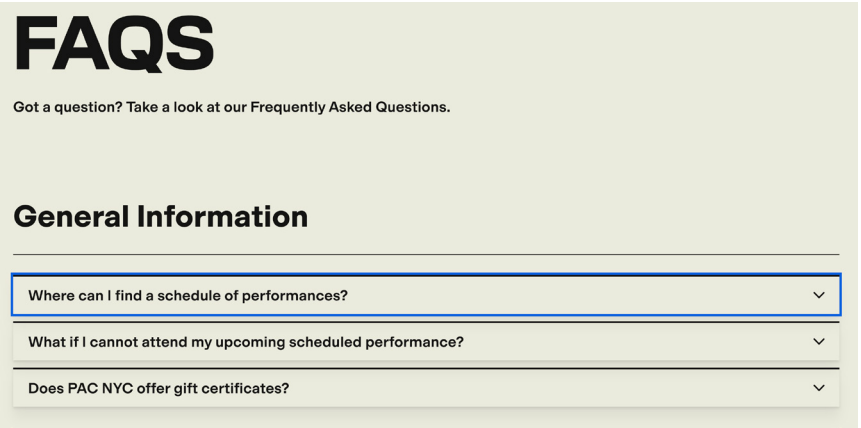
This meant they had no way of knowing which question they were about to expand unless they pressed Enter and triggered it - resulting in a trial-and-error experience that made the interaction slow, confusing, and frustrating.



Shows lack of focus indicator on FAQs – Focus is not showing on the expand/collapse controls.

The solution

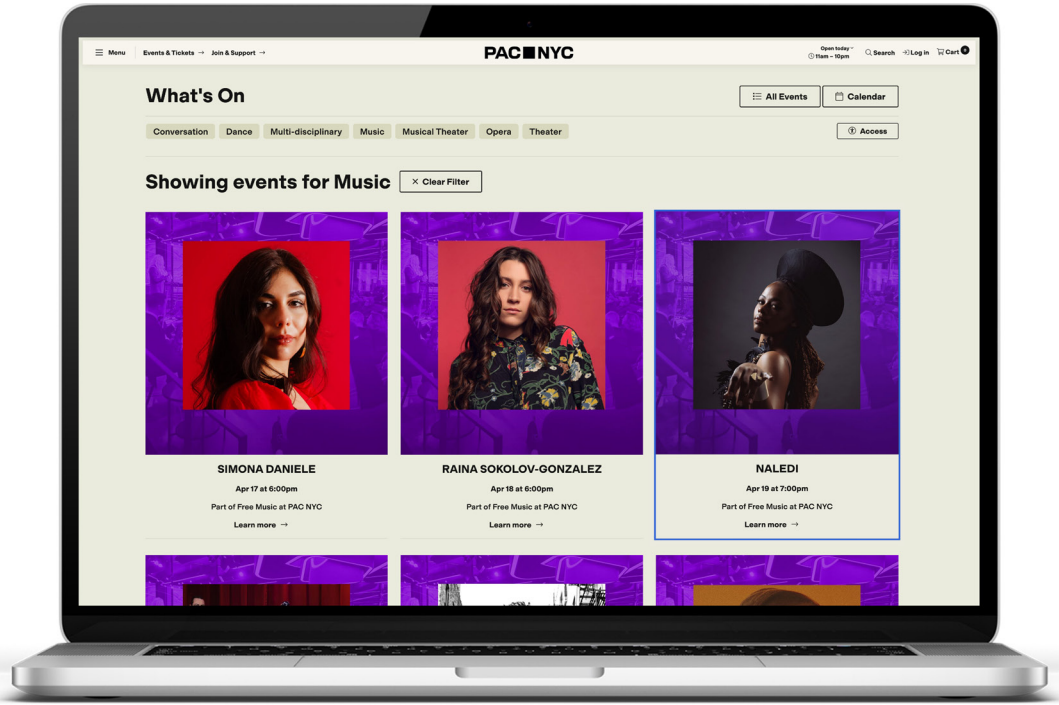
We added a visible focus indicator using the CSS selector **`:focus-visible,`** which applies a **`3px solid`** outline in our designated **`$focus-blue`** color. This ensures that when keyboard users navigate through the FAQ items, they can clearly see which element is currently focused. This improves accessibility and usability by removing the need for guesswork.



Example of the focus indicator hovering over an individual question

Tip

Focus rectangles can be designed in several ways, but the most important thing is that they remain clearly visible at all times. A limitation of WCAG guidelines is that they allow developers to use a browser's default focus rectangle, which may not always meet accessibility needs (sometimes they don't appear on more sophisticated elements of a site, like expand/collapse controls). We always advise that you create a custom focus rectangle that ensures proper contrast and visibility, making it more effective for users.



The What's On page of the PAC NYC website, shown on a laptop.

Part 5

The importance of an accessibility statement

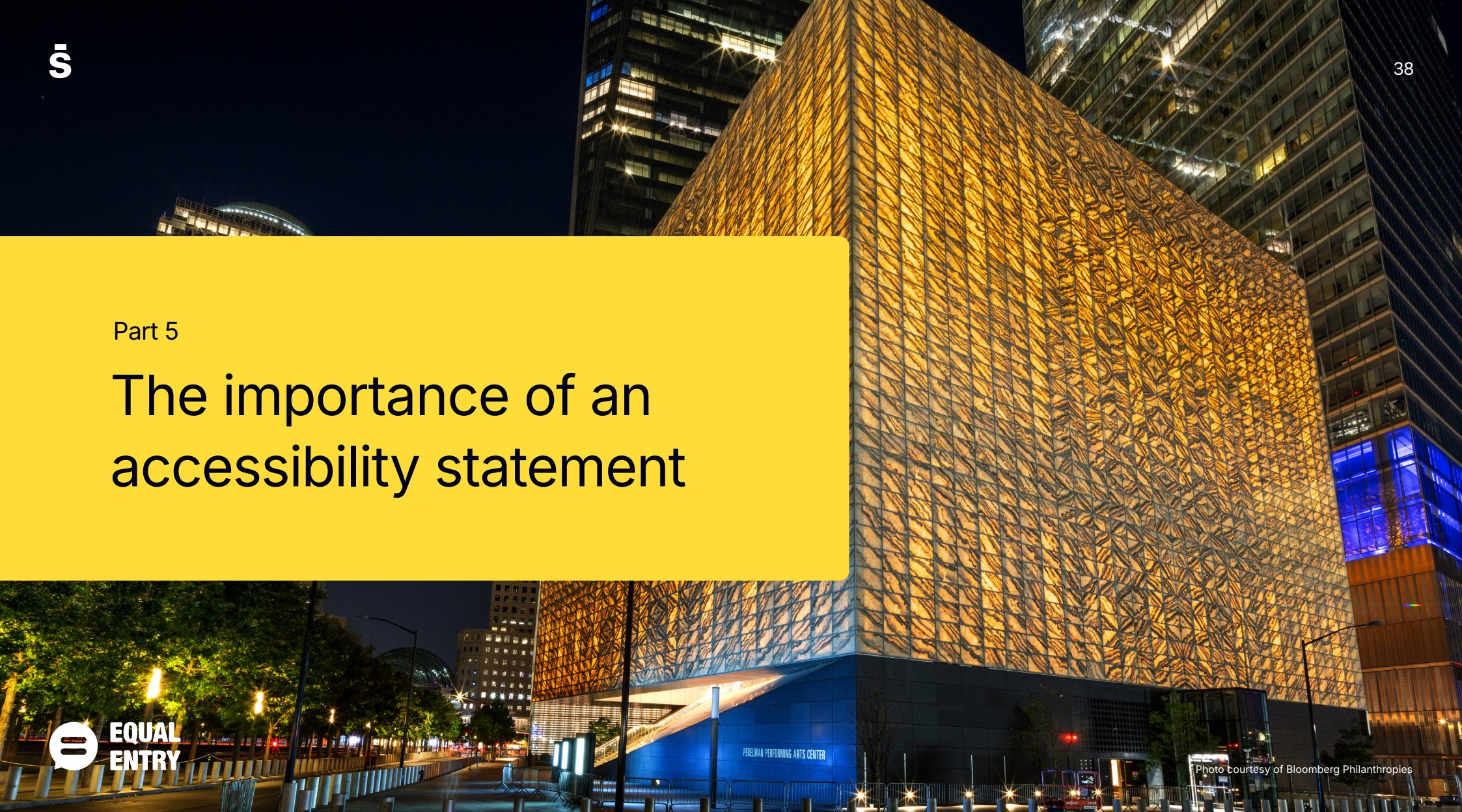
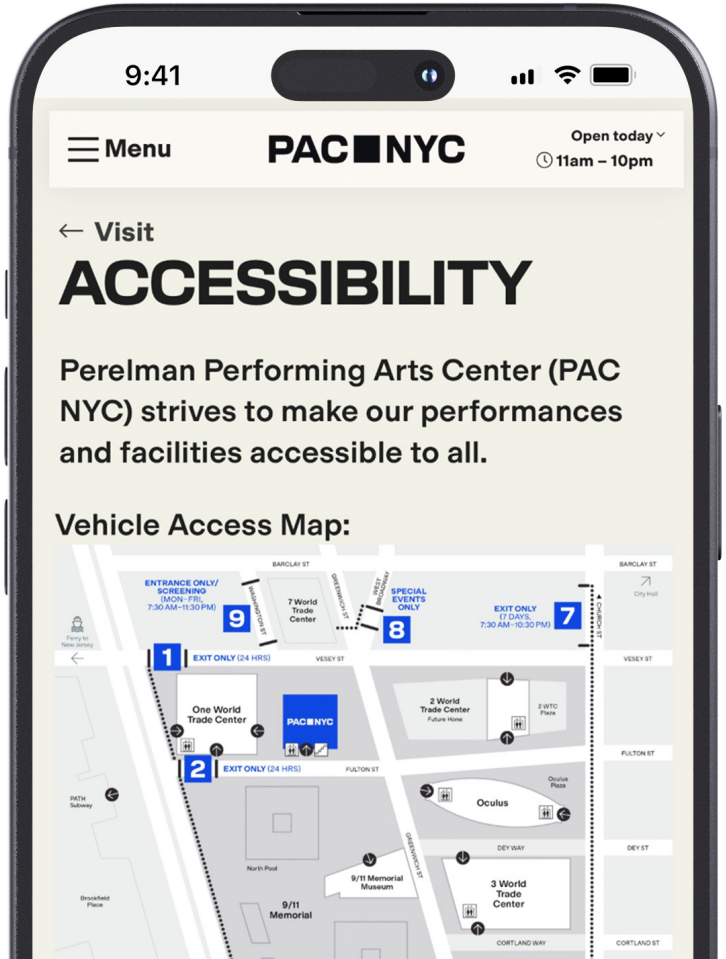


Photo courtesy of Bloomberg Philanthropies

Accessibility Statement and information

Some things are trickier than others when it comes to accessibility. One of the simpler things that every cultural organization can and should have is an easily discoverable accessibility statement and information page.



Right: The accessibility statement page of the PAC NYC website, shown on a mobile device.

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The accessibility statement and information page is a home for all of your information about access and accessibility. The most common place to find the link to this information is in the footer on every page of your website. This ensures visitors can always find it, regardless of what page they're on.

An accessibility page typically contains the following information:

The organization's commitment to accessibility

Policies regarding digital accessibility

Reference the guidelines the organization aims to follow. (Ex: WCAG 2.2 and EN 301 549)

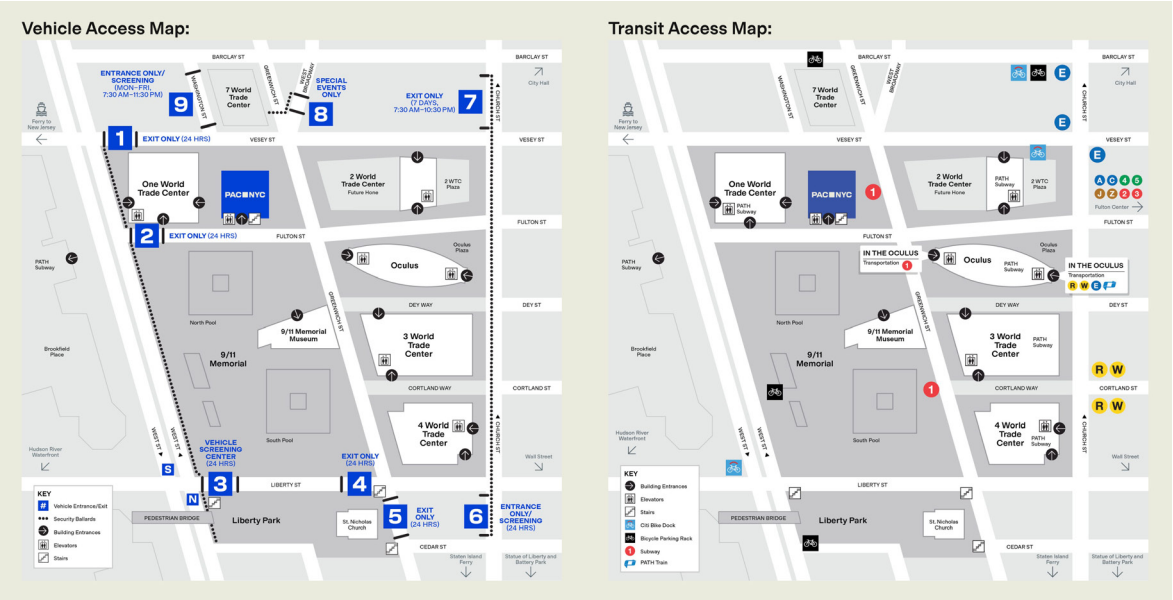
At least two forms of contact information (Ex: phone number and email address)

PAC NYC has organized this information across two distinct pages. One page focuses on providing access information about the venue, giving visitors everything they need to know before visiting. The second is a dedicated web accessibility statement, outlining the steps PAC has taken – and continues to take – to ensure their digital experience is fully accessible.

Accessibility page

The content on this page of PAC NYC's site anticipates questions for various access needs. It provides detailed information to help users feel comfortable booking a ticket and attending the venue.

They have a "Getting Here" section with information about accessible public transportation options and vehicle/transit access maps. It also has separate sections on individual access requirements, sharing detailed information about the measures in place to support those specific requirements.



Two maps side by side. One details vehicle access information, the other details transit access information.

These cover the following access needs:

- **Vision disabilities**
- **Hearing disabilities**
- **Mobility disabilities**
- **Sensory processing requirements**

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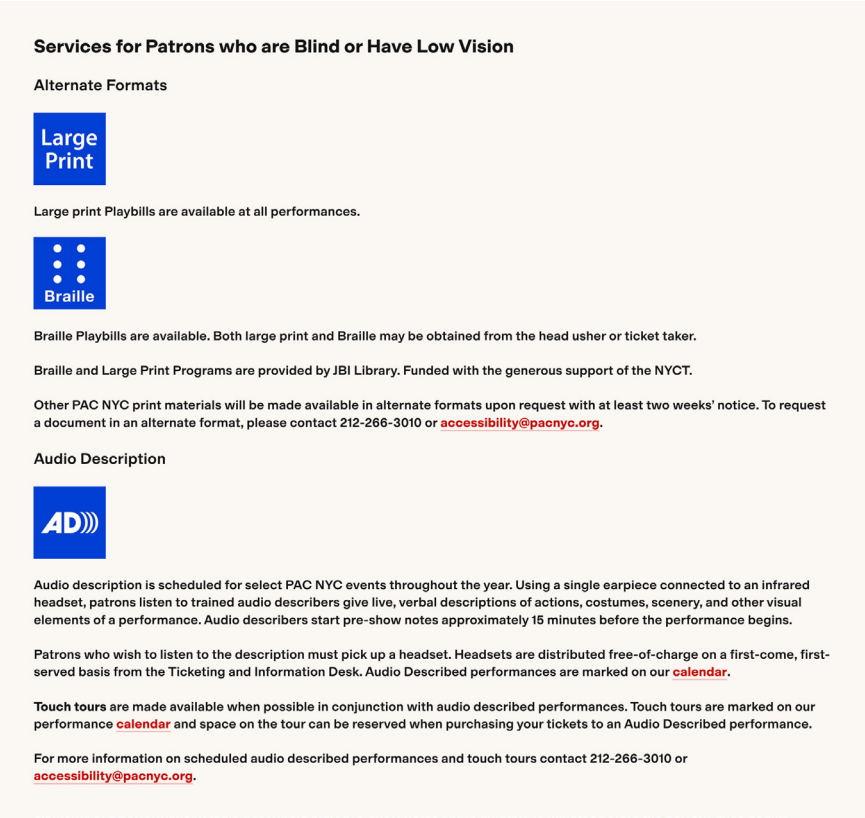


Services for Patrons who are Blind or Have Low Vision

Alternate Formats

Large Print

Large print Playbills are available at all performances.

Braille

Braille Playbills are available. Both large print and Braille may be obtained from the head usher or ticket taker.

Braille and Large Print Programs are provided by JBI Library. Funded with the generous support of the NYCT.

Other PAC NYC print materials will be made available in alternate formats upon request with at least two weeks' notice. To request a document in an alternate format, please contact 212-266-3010 or accessibility@pacnyc.org.

Audio Description

AD

Audio description is scheduled for select PAC NYC events throughout the year. Using a single earpiece connected to an infrared headset, patrons listen to trained audio describers give live, verbal descriptions of actions, costumes, scenery, and other visual elements of a performance. Audio describers start pre-show notes approximately 15 minutes before the performance begins.

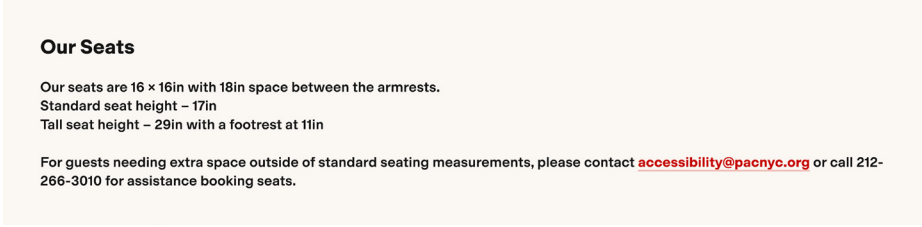
Patrons who wish to listen to the description must pick up a headset. Headsets are distributed free-of-charge on a first-come, first-served basis from the Ticketing and Information Desk. Audio Described performances are marked on our calendar.

Touch tours are made available when possible in conjunction with audio described performances. Touch tours are marked on our performance calendar and space on the tour can be reserved when purchasing your tickets to an Audio Described performance.

For more information on scheduled audio described performances and touch tours contact 212-266-3010 or accessibility@pacnyc.org.

Section of the accessibility page curated for blind or low vision users. It details the measures in place to support their requirements (e.g. Braille Playbills and audio description).

PAC NYC's accessibility page also includes a virtual tour, specific information about the size of the seats, and a "Family services" section to give users a full picture of what to expect.



Our Seats

Our seats are 16 × 16in with 18in space between the armrests.
Standard seat height – 17in
Tall seat height – 29in with a footrest at 11in

For guests needing extra space outside of standard seating measurements, please contact accessibility@pacnyc.org or call 212-266-3010 for assistance booking seats.

Section of the accessibility page explains the size of different seats in the venue.

Web accessibility statement

This page shows PAC NYC's commitment to making their website accessible for everyone, by:

- Explaining that they follow the WCAG 2.1 Level AA guidelines to ensure the site works well on different devices and browsers.
- Acknowledging they continue working every day to improve accessibility and the user experience.
- Providing contact information for users to report any accessibility issues.

This approach not only meets accessibility best practices but also shows that PAC NYC is dedicated to creating an inclusive online experience for all visitors.

It takes work, time, and an ongoing approach to do accessibility right. It's not a project. It's not something you do once and you're done. It's something that must be continuous.

Creating and publishing an accessibility page on a website is a valuable first step. It doesn't have to be complete or perfect. It'll be a living document, which means it will undergo continuous revisions and updates.

MicroAssist has a library of accessibility statements. The resource has several accessibility statements from different industries.

Part 6

The advantages and challenges of a phased approach

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Photo: Iwan Baan

For PAC NYC, accessibility wasn't a checklist - it was a guiding principle underpinning the development of both its physical venue and its digital presence. But creating something brand new, especially under tight timelines, meant balancing ambition with practicality. The team took a phased approach to launching their website, mirroring the staged construction of their building and the evolution of their internal team.

This approach was driven by necessity. The organization was still forming - hiring staff, finalizing construction, and preparing to open its doors - all while needing to sell tickets and engage audiences online. With limited time and shifting requirements, a flexible and phased rollout was the only viable strategy.

"We decided to use a phased approach due to very tight deadlines, which were determined by our building opening date."

– Leo Bowen, Digital Product Manager at PAC NYC

Phase 1 focused on one main goal: to sell tickets three months before the grand opening. This clear priority allowed the team to streamline their roadmap and postpone non-essential features. It also gave them room to bring additional voices into the process as the organization grew.

While pragmatic, the approach was not without its challenges. As the schedule shifted due to construction delays, there was temptation to expand the early scope. But the team remained intentional, weighing trade-offs and keeping accessibility front and center.

“It was tempting to use this opportunity to add more features to this early phase, and we had to carefully consider the pros and cons of deviating from our plan.”

In Phase 1, PAC NYC launched a basic ticket purchase path using a turnkey solution. It wasn’t perfect, but it was functional, accessible, and fast. More importantly, it served as an important learning opportunity. They gathered feedback which informed a more refined Phase 2 solution.

“We used our first sale as an opportunity to collect feedback and learn about our customers.”

By late 2023, PAC NYC was able to conduct the full accessibility audit with Equal Entry, having already addressed many foundational issues through earlier phases.

The phased approach ultimately allowed the team to balance necessity with inclusion, delivering access not as an afterthought, but as a process of continual refinement.

Part 7

Embedding inclusive habits: What did PAC NYC learn?

Following the accessibility audit and implementation process, PAC NYC has integrated several new practices into their ongoing content and development workflows:

Improved screen reader readability for uppercase text

We now apply uppercase styling using semantic HTML () instead of typing in all caps. This ensures that screen readers pronounce words correctly, improving clarity for assistive technology users.

More descriptive link text

We've reduced our reliance on generic phrases like "Learn More" and are actively working toward more meaningful, context-specific link labels.

Consistent and logical heading structure

We're applying a clear, hierarchical approach to headings (e.g., H1 > H2 > H3) across all new content pages. This not only improves accessibility for screen readers, but also enhances navigation and content clarity for all users.

Expanded access features in the purchase path

We're introducing new options during ticket checkout to better support accessible seating requests. For example, a new field allows buyers to indicate how an access seat should be handled - making accommodations more personalized and effective.

Accessibility checks for all new PDFs

We now review and verify the accessibility of PDF documents before publishing them to ensure they meet best practice standards for screen reader compatibility and navigability.

Part 8

Conclusion

PAC NYC's digital accessibility journey shows that accessibility isn't a one-time checklist, it's a long-term commitment. By approaching accessibility as a foundational value, PAC NYC has created a more inclusive online experience - not just for audiences with disabilities, but for everyone.

This paper has explored the real-world impact of common barriers and the tangible improvements that can be made through thoughtful design, collaboration, and testing. From link labelling and keyboard focus to accessible donation flows and meaningful content structure, each fix has contributed to a more inclusive experience.

What worked so well for PAC NYC was the combination of:

- A phased and realistic rollout strategy, grounded in practical constraints.
- Collaboration across teams, from development to content to leadership.
- A willingness to learn and adapt, including running audits, gathering feedback, and revisiting earlier assumptions.

One thing PAC NYC's experience makes very clear is that accessibility improves the experience for everyone. Better focus states, clearer link text, and streamlined flows don't just benefit screen reader users or keyboard-only users - they enhance usability and comprehension across the board.

This project is proof that when access is built into the process, digital spaces become more welcoming, more usable, and more human.

šubstrakt

Great digital experiences should work for everyone. If you're in the arts and culture sector and want to make your digital spaces more accessible, we'd love to help. Just get in touch with Substrakt to see how we can support your next project.

team@substrakt.com

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Accessibility isn't a feature, it's a foundation. If you're looking to make your website or digital tools easier for everyone to use, Equal Entry's here to help you get it right.

Contact **contact@equalentry.com** to find out more.

Produced and edited by

Kathryn Mason – Marketing & Communications Lead, Substrakt
Zosia Poulter – Content Lead, Substrakt
Thomas Logan – Owner and CEO, Equal Entry
Meryl Evans – Director of Marketing and Accessibility Consultant, Equal Entry
Vlado Vince – Former Director of Information Technology, PAC NYC
Leo Bowen – Digital Product Manager, PAC NYC

Designed by Substrakt

Daniel Alcorn – Design Lead
Serlina Small – Junior Designer

substrakt.com

equalentry.com