Guidance on Expanding Brooklyn Botanic Garden’s Welcome

Brooklyn Botanic Garden, with support from Turnstile Studio, engaged frontline staff and accessibility advisors in a project to create staff training videos with a focus on providing more welcoming experiences for all visitors, including people with disabilities. Each advisor shared guidance in these videos for frontline staff, which is included below:

Universal Access and Welcoming All Visitors
Guidance from Ansel Lurio, Cultural Accessibility Consultant
- One person with a disability does not represent all people with disabilities.
- Be prepared and welcoming.
- Always ask about needs, never assume what a visitor needs.
- Strive for universal access.
- Treat disabled and non-disabled visitors the same way.

Welcoming Visitors who are Blind or who have low vision
Guidance from Nefertiti Matos, Cultural Accessibility Consultant
- Be as welcoming as you would be to anyone else.
- Trust that visitors know what they need.
- Don’t take it personally if assistance is refused.
- Offer all the options that are available.
- Do not take the arm of a person who is blind without consent.
- Speak directly to the person.
- Describe as much as you can.
- Use descriptive language when giving directions.
- Announce yourself when you approach and leave.

Welcoming Visitors with Service Dogs
Guidance from Lauren Berglund, Guide Dog Foundation / America’s VetDogs
- Speak to the individual, not the service dog.
- Do not pet, distract, or engage in any way with the dog.
- Do not ask the individual about their disability or their need for a service dog.
- Service dogs can be trained to support people who have a variety of disabilities.
Guidance on Expanding Brooklyn Botanic Garden’s Welcome

- Be respectful.

Multimodal Communication
Guidance from Virginia Shou, Visual Communication Designer and Gardener
- Treat people with disabilities like human beings.
- Use gestures to communicate and complement your words.
- Use maps and point your finger when giving directions.
- Learn basic signs in American Sign Language.

Hearing Access for All Visitors
Guidance from Ruth Bernstein, Hearing Access Advocate
- Hearing loss is an invisible disability.
- Make good eye contact when speaking to guests.
- Speak in a normal tone of voice, don’t shout.
- Use a pen and pencil or a smartphone to assist with communication.

Introduction to Hearing Loop Systems
Guidance from Karen MacLennan, Doctor of Audiology
- Hearing loop systems provide hearing access to guests with hearing loss.
- The hearing loop logo lets visitors know when spaces are hearing-accessible.
- Speak into the microphone.

Welcoming Visitors with Behavioral Differences
Guidance from Michael John Carley, Author and Neurodiversity Consultant
- We are conditioned to be afraid of differences in behavior, but we don't have to stay that way.
- Don’t assume that a person is in distress or is threatening if they have differences in behavior.
- Be a peacemaker whenever possible.
- Take time to understand.
- Every behavior we don't understand is a story someone is trying to tell us.
- Social anxiety is common and may cause differences in behaviors.
- Some people have challenges with motor skills.
Guidance on Expanding Brooklyn Botanic Garden’s Welcome

- Trust that visitors are expressing their emotions and navigating space in the best way they know how.