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**Disability and the
Arts, Creative, and
Cultural Industries
in Australia**

**Professor Bree Hadley
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

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Disability and the Arts, Creative, and Cultural Industries in Australia

Spotlight on Workforce Capability and Confidence

Acceptance that people with disability have the right to participation, self-representation, employment and economic opportunity in the cultural industries (CRPD 30) has improved since the 1980s. This has been achieved through festival production in the International Year of Persons with Disabilities (1981); access arts organisations funded from the 1980s forward – Arts Access (Queensland), Accessible Arts (New South Wales), Arts Access Victoria (Victoria), Access to Arts (South Australia), DADAA (Western Australia), Incite Arts (Northern Territory) and national advocacy organisation Access Arts Australia; celebrated companies such as Back to Back Theatre, Restless Dance Theatre, and Weave Movement Theatre emerging in the 1980s and 1990s; Awakenings and High Beam festivals in the 1990s and 2000s; and the first *Arts and Disability Research Report* (Australia Council 1995), followed by *Making the journey: Arts and Disability in Australia* (Arts Access Australia 2005).

Australia's first National Arts & Disability Strategy (2009) brought new funding, project, and mentorship initiatives. Community, independent, and professional companies engaged in arts and disability practice increased (Hadley 2017; Hadley & Goggin 2019; Commonwealth of Australia (CofA) 2018). New festivals profiling disability arts emerged (Undercover Artist 2015–, Flow 2019–, Platform 2020–, Alter/State 2022–). Initiatives like Carriageworks' New Normal, and invitations to pitch to major festivals like Sydney Festival, forged links to mainstream industry.

Industry and scholarly research insisted an inclusive sector adopt a social model of disability, changing infrastructure, institutions, and systems to include diverse artists and audiences, not just assimilating them through adjustments to extant work modes (Hadley et al. 2022).

Not all people with physical, sensory, or intellectual impairments, medical or mental health conditions identify with the term disability, and not all organisations collect data. Available data shows just over 40% of organisations have a Disability Action Plan (Arts Access Australia (AAA) 2020). People with disabilities engage the cultural sector more than those without disabilities: 70% attend events or exhibitions, 61% take part in community programs, 24% volunteer (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016; Australia Council 2017; Throsby & Petetskaya 2017; CofA 2018). People with disabilities do this to:

- Challenge attitudes and interactions experienced as a result of stereotypes that portray people with disability as objects of fear, pity, or inspiration (Royal Commission 2020)
- Build confidence, communication skills, and capacity for self-expression
- Train and develop desired career trajectories in the arts, media, and cultural sectors
- Engage in "serious leisure" (Patterson 1997) that stands in place of employment.

Australians with disabilities make up

- 9% of Australia's arts and cultural 48,000 professional arts workers,
- 7% of applicants to Australia Council's core funding rounds,
- 4% of artists and personnel in receipt of grant funding throughSmartygrants, and
- 3% of arts and cultural leaders (Australia Council 2021, AAA 2020, CofA 2018).

In a context where nearly 20% of Australians identify as disabled this is not parity (ABS 2016). Artists with disabilities earn 42% less and derive 55% of their income from disability support pensions or other non-arts sources, compared to 14% for peers (Throsby & Petetskaya 2017;

ABS 2016). Though the sector has a trajectory to positive engagement, it is thus still actively addressing disability confidence, employment, and economic participation (AAA 2020)

Building Better Practices In The Arts, Creative, and Cultural Industries

There are five interrelated factors that support arts workers, arts organisations, and the arts sector at large to develop improved policy, protocol, and training practices.

1. The cultural sector adopts an evidence-based approach

Australia's first National Arts & Disability Strategy (2009) drew on over a decade's research, and the (historical) Department of Communication and the Arts developed a new Research Overview for the Meeting of Cultural Ministers (2018) ahead of a planned update to the Strategy. This evidence-based approach uses Census, scholarly, and industry research, program evaluations, and other data to assess impact of funding, mentorship, leadership, and other development initiatives. It joins Australian Research Council projects examining the ecology and evolution of the sector (*Disability and Digital TV; Disability and the Performing Arts in Australia, The Evolution of Disability Arts in Australia*). Data is used in reports – e.g. *Towards Equity: A Research Overview of Diversity in Australia's Arts and Cultural sector* (Australia Council 2021), and in consultation to inform future policy, funding, and development approaches.

The benefit of this evidence-based approach is that it enables the cultural sector to compare past and present practice, programs within and across artforms, within Australia and with comparable work in the US, UK, or Europe. It **provides beyond anecdotal assessment of whether training just improves sentiment or in fact improves practices and outcomes.**

2. The cultural sector values Australians with disability as a visible part of our culture

Valuing Australians with disability as a visible part of our culture is the central mission of the National Arts & Disability Strategy (2009). The cultural sector thus takes a rights-based approach, addressing the value, visibility, and representation of people with disability – as full participants in Australian society – at the same time it addresses professional/industrial relations. Self-determination is central to all international convention, policy, and strategy. However, unlike in accredited fields like law, education, or medicine, there is no technical/legal – as opposed to ideological/attitudinal – restriction to artists with disability controlling what happens, when, where, and how in the cultural sector. No credential is required to tell one's story on screen or in a book. There are those who say it is an artist's craft to tell stories they have not lived, who come into conflict with others critical of artists who "crip up" to a play a person with disability on stage, write a stereotyped story about disability, or represent a disability in a stereotyped way (Hadley 2021). But the Strategy, and the work it drives, values disability culture, as a shared set of beliefs, discourses and behaviours, based on shared history of oppression, and strategies to survive it (Gill 1995; Koppers 2014; Hadley et al. 2022).

The focus on value, visibility, and self-determination means most organisations providing or pursuing policy, protocol, and training in the cultural sector (Appendix 1) seek more than information training to create awareness of disability issues to shift attitudes. Making cultural venues, institutions, collections/programs accessible requires disciplinary competencies. Access arts organisations and consultants provide training to show what artists with disability can do when workplaces are accessible – legislation, language, protocols and processes artists and organisations can deploy in their policies, plans, and work practices (Appendix 2).

The best offer disability confidence or inclusion training – which organisations like Accessible Arts are starting to call ally training (Accessible Arts 2021; Hadley 2019; Appendix 2). This assists allies through a self-reflexive process, from seeing an unfair situation, to seeing the systematic nature of that unfairness as a socially reproduced pattern of relationships, to working in safe, respectful, trusting partnerships with artists with disabilities to change the system that reproduces those relationships (Hadley 2020, Hadley et al. 2022; Broido 2000; Evans, Assadi & Herriott 2005). It asks allies to remember their privilege, hear accounts of oppression, and reflect on issues of labour, status, capital, competence, confidence, and safety that may lead workers to act as optical, performative, or ‘pseudo’ rather than active, committed, disability community endorsed allies (Hadley 2020; Appendix 3). It is intersectional, because both artists and allies may identify as disabled, albeit with different disabilities, and may also identify as First Nations, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, LGBTIQ+, and/or women artists (Hadley 2020). Artists may be at different career stages, working across recreational, community, independent, or mainstream practices, desiring different support from allies (Hadley 2020).

Ally training moves beyond logistical access focused on infrastructure (ramps, captions, hearing loops), to supporting artists with disability to lead conversations about ideological access focused on language, discourse, and representation (which stories we tell, when, where, and how), and methodological access (preferred communication, collaboration, and work modalities) (Hadley 2015; Hadley 2022; Hadley et al. forthcoming 2023). Success – in this model of change (Serrat 2017) – is measured not just by an ally’s knowledge, or willingness to implement adjustments to assimilate artists with disability into extant cultural sector work models, but by willingness to transform the fundamental way these work models function to make them inclusive of all (Hadley 2020; Hadley et al. 2022; Hadley et al. forthcoming 2023)

The benefit of this training is that it empowers allies to develop working knowledge of “disability arts and culture methods” – the communication, collaboration, and creative modes artists with disabilities use (Kuppers 2014). In the arts, lack of knowledge, comfort, and confidence to engage positively with artists with disability is expressed as “we would like to employ artists with disability but...” The “but” includes concerns about if enough artists with disability exist, quality of training, capacity to do work, marketability of work, and time, cost, and complexity of adjustments (Ellis 2016; Hadley 2020). An inclusive, culture-based approach **empowers allies to collaborate with artists from the outset of engagement – to experience the strength, creativity, and innovation of disability arts and culture work modes – not just adjust extant work modes.** This includes upskilling all involved to enact access provisions – easy read summaries, ‘relaxed’ sound, light, and sensory conventions, ‘out’ spaces, audio descriptions, captions, including via free software – to create physically, psychologically, socially, and culturally safe spaces where all can creatively lead and contribute.

3. The cultural sector adopts a ‘disability-led’ approach

People with lived experience of disability have the right to make decisions about issues that impact them (Oliver 1992), but terms like “lived experience” have been co-opted to describe by-proxy experience of parents, partners, children, and carers, and “consultancy” and “co-design” models have been critiqued for standing in place of self-determination without offering real agency (Goodley 1992). The cultural sector differentiates between mainstream arts which involves artists with disability without representing disability issues, ally-led “arts and disability” practice, and artist-led “disability arts” practice (Hadley & McDonald 2019).

To translate terminology into working knowledge, training, and action, the cultural sector has developed guides, to assist artists and allies to reflect on degrees of self-determination

afforded by disability led programs, co-designed programs, and ally-led programs – for example the Access Arts Undercover Artist Festival guide (Little & Hadley 2021; Appendix 4). A decision tree aids reflection on level of control over programming, copyright, and future disposition of work. In this Festival, artists and allies were, after reflection, welcome to propose work to different parts of a multi-part program, with ‘disability arts’ and ‘arts and disability’ streams. This ‘trained’ artists and allies to distinguish disability- and non-disability- led work, whilst including artists at early career stages and in therapeutic, recreational or community contexts choosing the ally directorial or curatorial control of an ‘arts and disability’ model.

The benefit of this terminology and guidance is its ability to support development of working knowledge of degrees of choice and control, and enact them in practice. It gives artist and ally **a tool/technique to be confident that mutual understanding of terms like leadership, co-design, and consultation is not just assumed, but actively negotiated in each engagement.**

4. The cultural sector self-articulates varied policy, protocol, and training approaches

Arts Access Australia, state access arts organisations, and – to varying degrees – peak bodies representing theatre, dance, music, visual arts, museums, galleries, and libraries, articulate policy, protocols, and training approaches for the cultural sector (Appendix 1).

Access arts organisations offer individual and group training – historically face-to-face instruction, discussion, workshopping, and reflection now available online – along with assessment, analysis, and assistance to develop formal Disability Action Plans. Arts Access Australia’s annual Meeting Place Arts & Disability Forum, and Accessible Arts’ biannual Arts Activated conference, also feature training sessions, panels, discussions, and debates.

Sector peak organisations may emphasise artists or audiences, inclusion or industrial matters of venue, equipment, infrastructure, pay, and conditions. Theatre Network Australia (TNA) offers an Equity Action Plan engaging with access for d/Deaf, disabled, and neurodiverse artists, and AusDance offers Safe Dance Practice guidelines engaging with different bodies and abilities. Music Australia promotes work by others. Live Performance Australia (LPA), being commercial focused, focuses on venues, ticketing, and audience experience. The Australian Libraries and Information Association (ALIA), whose members manage collections and institutions, has digital and physical access guidelines. The Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA) is updating its 1999 Code of Ethics, to include protocol for disability access. The National Association for Visual Arts (NAVA) campaigns in relation to Indigenous and Gender Equality, but inclusion of d/Deaf and disabled artists is not yet prominent. This may be because AMaGA is more representative of institutions, with collections the public has a right to access, while NAVA is more representative of interests of individual artist members.

The benefit of this varied set of self-driven articulations of policy, protocol and training is assessing **impact of different sub-sectoral approaches.** Access arts organisations offer disability specific policy, research, and training. Facilitators now often self-identity as typically performing artists, arts managers, and policy makers with disability. Other organisations, typically in the visual arts – internationally, if not in Australia to date – include disability in broader inclusivity policy or training, as in International Council of Museum’s (ICOM’s) “Creating Meaningful and Inclusive Museum Practices” MOOC (2021). The data, thus far, suggests people with disabilities participate in visual arts recreation and community programs at slightly higher rates. Performing arts have been slightly swifter to support programming, presentation, and employment opportunities, particularly through festivals

(Hadley 2017; Hadley & McDonald 2019; Hadley et al. forthcoming 2023). Variance and experiments across sub-sectors are thus instructive for future training.

5. The cultural sector is suited to self- and social- entrepreneurship work models

The limited scope for self-determination Australian Disability Enterprises offer via work conditions adjustment or consultations has been critiqued, but even with advocates accommodation in open employment is difficult (Moore, McDonald & Bartlett 2018). Social enterprise and entrepreneurial self-employment allow scope to self-determine work experience, and thus hold potential to support meaningful social, employment, and economic participation for people with disabilities (Maritz & Laferriere 2016).

The arts, creative, and cultural sector – always characterised by a high proportion of entrepreneurial, small-to-medium, community, and not-for-profit enterprises – supports social enterprise and entrepreneurial self-employment. The structural features of the sector, if combined with the ally support practices above, can support artists with disabilities to produce, promote, sell, and distribute visual arts and crafts products in particular (Hadley 2020; Moore et al. 2018). Social enterprise Arts Projects Australia (APA), for instance, supports the work of, promotes, sells, and upon sale recompenses artists with intellectual disabilities (APA no date). Applying learnings about disability led practice, allyship, and evidence-based approaches to social enterprise and entrepreneurship models, allies can thus support artists with disability to take advantage of cultural and new digital economies, individually or in groups, to distribute their creative work as an income generating product.

The benefit of social enterprise and entrepreneurship models in the arts is they show how allies – having acquired confidence in disability-led practice, respectful, responsive allyship, and creating culturally safe workspace – can have **transformative impact, collaborating with artists to create meaningful employment, beyond extant economic models.**

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Appendix 1 – Arts, Creative, and Cultural Sector Peak Bodies

Peak body for disability arts advocacy Australia wide, **Access Arts Access Australia** (<https://artsaccessaustralia.org>), has consulted with the sector, to develop an Australian Code of Conduct for Access in the Arts, to support better practice sector wide. The Draft Guiding Principles available on their website during consultation emphasise eight points:

1. We respect and comply with anti-discrimination laws, and the need to eliminate ableism, in everything we do
2. We embed the social model of disability, cultural safety, authenticity, and creative control for Deaf and Disabled people, in our policies and organisational activities
3. We create equitable, sustainable and meaningful training, employment, leadership, and professional development opportunities for diverse Deaf and Disabled people in the arts
4. We provide accessible, accurate and timely information to facilitate informed consent, inclusive participation, and informed decision-making by everyone we engage with
5. We remove barriers for audience with access requirements, fostering inclusive environments and equal opportunities to participate in and enjoy the arts
6. We recognise Deaf and Disabled artists and arts workers as important cultural assets in Australia, prioritising involvement in new creative projects
7. We include representation of Deaf and Disabled artists on screen, stage, online, museums, galleries and all other spaces within the arts landscape, respecting also intersectionality and First People's protocols
8. We are respectful allies, working to increase the choice and control of Deaf and Disabled people. We do this through real partnerships, respectful relationships and facilitating appropriate support

(Arts Access Australia 2022, https://artsaccessaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/DRAFT-Guiding-Principles_Australian-Code-of-Conduct-for-Access-in-the-Arts_Nov-2021-UPDATED.docx)

State based access arts organisations including **Arts Access (QLD)**, **Accessible Arts (NSW)**, **Arts Access Victoria (Vic)**, **Access to Arts (SA)**, **DADAA (WA)**, **Incite Arts (NT)** offer Disability Awareness, Disability Confidence, and most recently Allyship training for individual professionals and organisations in the sector, along with consultancy to develop the Disability Action Plans now in place in some 40% of organisations. In some cases, this is designed, developed, and offered in house, through staff of the organisation, in others through access consultants working in partnership with the organisation. In some cases, the focus remains on conventional awareness – definitions, relevant legislation, adjustment, accommodation, and access provision, and positive engagement with people with disability. In other cases, the models have transitioned towards building cultural safety, trust, and respect, as essential precursors to strong artist-ally relationships, which go beyond positive sentiment, to active support designed to assist artists with disabilities in achieving self-defined aims via self-determined methods.

Theatre Network Australia (<https://tna.org.au/>), a development organisation supporting 500+ individual, small, and small-to-medium contemporary companies, undertaking research and advocacy, and offering an Equity Action Plan – which includes equity for artists with

disabilities, and which it encourages members and others in the industry to draw upon, together with resources relating to salaries, conditions, and other issues of concern (<https://tna.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/TNA-Equity-Action-Plan-AUGUST-2021-For-Publication-1.pdf>)

AusDance (<https://ausdance.org.au/>), has engaged dance practitioners, teachers, and students around Australia with the question of how to cater for 'different bodies and abilities,' as part of 'Safe Dance Practice' broadly defined, since publishing its [Australian Guidelines for Teaching Dance](#) in 2011.

While **National Association for the Visual Arts** (NAVA) <https://visualarts.net.au/> "leads advocacy, policy and action for a contemporary Australian arts sector that's ambitious and fair," and does include Indigenous, and Inter-Cultural Practitioners in its 'Code of Practice for the Professional Australian Visual Arts, Craft, and Design Sector,' research, and campaigns – and also campaigns in relation to gender equity – it does not address inclusion of d/Deaf and disabled artists in its policy, research, or campaigns.

Live Performance Australia (LPA) (<https://liveperformance.com.au>) is positioned to promote the interest of member individuals/organisations, with negotiating contract, events, venues, and agreement, providing safe work conditions, lobbying government, and researching the sector. Its advocacy is in the interest of these producers and venues. As part of Best Practice Guides, it offers LPA Guide – Arts Access Information Kit to assist members "catering for people with a disability."

Music Australia (<https://musicaustralia.org.au>) works with members and partners to promote [Music industry](#), [Music in communities](#), and [Music education](#) – its advocacy agenda does not specifically engage d/Deaf and disabled artists, as professionals, teachers, students, or community participants, though it does promote the work of others in this area, such as the access arts agencies.

The **Australian Museums and Galleries Association** (AMaGA) <https://www.amaga.org.au/> representing, advocating, and providing professional development for museums and galleries, is currently updating, its 1999 Code of Ethics – with advice that its current endorsement for Uluru Statement from the Heart, #BlackLivesMatter, Women's Policy, and Gay and Lesbian Policy, will and Sustainable Development, will expand to include access.

The **Australian Libraries and Information Association** (<https://www.alia.org.au/>), which leads, represents, promotes, advocates, and provides development for the library sector and library professionals, sets out to respect diversity, individuality, and free flow of information and ideas. Its APLA-ALIA guidelines for public libraries acknowledge the need to design for access for all members of society (onsite, offsite, online), and there are specific [Guidelines on Library and Information Services for People with Disabilities](#) (Adopted 1998. Amended 2019).

Appendix 2 – How to Be A Good Ally Workshop

Excerpt from: **Accessible Arts**. 2021 “How to be a Good Ally Workshop” 16 November 2021.
<https://aarts.net.au/how-to-be-a-good-ally-workshop/>

About Us

We’re the peak arts and disability organisation in New South Wales. We advance the rights of, and opportunities for, people with disability or who are d/Deaf to develop and sustain professional careers in the arts and have equitable access to arts and culture across NSW.

How to be a Good Ally Workshop

Disability confidence starts with awareness. As disability education and advocacy experts, we have designed this new workshop to support businesses and organisations to be a good ally to the 1 in 5 Australians with disability or who are d/Deaf.

Covering topics from unconscious bias and ableism to the top issues facing disabled artists, this insightful workshop will improve your understanding of disability and provide a comfortable space to ask questions.

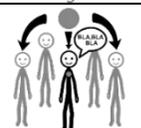
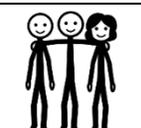
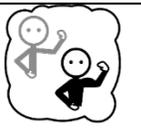
Learn about:

- Open communication – be confident in knowing the appropriate language and etiquette
- Understanding that one disabled person’s experience is one disabled person’s experience
- Learn which questions are OK to ask (and which ones aren’t really OK)
- Facilitating autonomy
- How to be proactive
- Ensuring inclusion – “Nothing about us without us”
- Attendees will also be provided with useful resources to help their teams also be good allies.

(Accessible Arts 2021)

Appendix 3 – Spectrums of Allyship

Excerpt from: **Bree Hadley**. Allyship in Disability Arts 101. Undercover Artist Festival Workshop. 24 August 2022. Queensland Theatre.
<https://undercoverartistfest.com/workshops-2022/allyship-101/>.

Spectrums of Allyship					
Personal, social, professional and artistic drivers of attitude/action in 'allyship' relationship	Axis	Critiqued Allies		Valued Allies	
What amount of work are you willing to put in to a collaboration?	Work	 <i>Image: Public</i>	Optical or performative ally	Active ally	 <i>Image: Work</i>
What sort of status, career, or financial benefit are you wanting achieve through a collaboration?	Status	 <i>Image: Win</i>	Ally of convenience	Committed ally	 <i>Image: Support</i>
Which industry or community group's approval or disapproval of your role in a collaboration is meaningful to you?	Relationships	 <i>Image: Spokesperson</i>	Entitled ally	Endorsed ally	 <i>Image: Friends</i>
What sort(s) of power – based on personality, position, knowledge, information, relationships, or control – do you seek in a collaboration?	Power	 <i>Image: Power</i>	Pseudo ally	Authentic ally	 <i>Image: Share</i>
What makes you feel physically, psychologically, and culturally confident to work even if outcomes are not certain?	Risk	 <i>Image: Confused</i>	Un-confident or un-competent ally	Culturally competent ally	 <i>Image: Assure</i>
What makes you feel physically, psychologically, and culturally safe?	Safety	 <i>Image: Scared</i>	Un-safe ally	Culturally safe ally	 <i>Image: Happy</i>

Appendix 4 – Decision Tree Models

Excerpt from: **Madeleine Little** Undercover Artists 2021, Festival Director & Professor **Bree Hadley** Undercover Artist Festival 2021, Steering Group Chair. 2021. 'What Is Disability-Led?' Guide, Access Arts, 12 February 2021. <https://undercoverartistfest.com/news/what-is-disability-led/>.

Is my creative work disability-led?

Undercover Artist Festival Disability-led Guide <http://undercoverartistfest.com/what-is-disability-led/>.

To determine if your creative work is disability-led, and you can apply for the Creative Track, we suggest you ask yourself the following questions:

	Group 1: Artist(s) with lived experience of d/Deafness or disability	Group 2: Allies/people without lived experience of d/Deafness or disability
<p>Who is initiating this creative project?</p> <p>Who is leading the creative project, by making decisions about the style, story, and strategy for engaging spectators in the creative project?</p> <p>Who is making decisions about which artists will take on the key creative roles – writer, director, producer, etc?</p> <p>Who will have the right to make the final decision if there are differences of opinion about how to describe the work, and each collaborators role in it, in a grant application, media release, or any documentation of the work?</p> <p>Who will have the right to decide to restage the work at another venue, event, or festival in a year, five years, or ten years, and decide to include or not include current collaborators in the restaging?</p> <p>Who owns copyright of the work?</p>	<p>If this project is initiated by artists with disability, and they are making decisions (or making a significant contribution to decision making) about which artists will take on key creative roles, and about the style, promotion, and future presentation options for the work, it is likely this is a disability-led work.</p> <p>You can apply for the Creative Track of Undercover Artist Festival.</p>	<p>If this creative project is initiated by artists without disability, and/or artists without disability are making decisions about which artists will take on key creative roles, or about the style, promotion and future presentation options for the work, it is likely this is an ally-led work.</p> <p>You should apply for the Community Track of Undercover Artist Festival.</p>

If you answer 'Group 1' to most or all of these questions, it is likely you are producing a disability-led work in which artists with disability have control over the process used to create the work, and the way they are represented in the work.

Excerpt from: **Bree Hadley, Morgan Batch & Michael Whelan.** 2020. *The Entitled Ally: Authorship, Consultation, and the 'Right' to Stage Autistic People's Stories.* *Disability & Society.* <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09687599.2020.1794796>

Mechanisms to clarify the meaning, role, and consequences of 'consultation' beforehand are critical.

What is needed, at least, is a mechanism like the decision tree diagram we suggest below, as a sort of common-sense guide for artists and storytellers, to inform the structure of their consultation process, and – based on the commitment to implement feedback – manage expectations around the resulting work.

