4.2a Cultural Facilities

Cultural facilities, by their very nature, attract diverse groups of users. Particularly in New York City, citizens and visitors of all ages, sizes, abilities and cultures use museums, galleries, zoological gardens, etc. Therefore it is particularly important to acknowledge this diversity and ensure usability by everyone.

Site Design

Cultural facilities should be easily accessible from public transit, parking and public pathways. This creates a good introductory experience for the first time visitor. Since many of these facilities are attended by tours, there is a need to provide sufficient space for small or large groups. In some of these facilities, like zoological gardens, outdoor activities may be the main attraction. Providing year round comfort and access to outdoor sites is a key design goal.

Guidelines:

- Locate the main building entrance in closest proximity to the major points of public access. This may be a transit stop, a pedestrian pathway or a parking lot. Study each site to determine the priorities based on expected visitor volume.

Figure 4.2a.1. The corner entrance to the Guggenheim Museum provides its visitors with convenient access to local transportation including a subway stop only one block away.
Design outdoor attractions so that people of all statures, whether standing or seated, can have an unobstructed appreciation of the attraction. Provide more than one choice.

Use pathways on the site to enable pedestrians to anticipate the attractions inside. Windows, small display cases and signboards with current attractions will provide an orientation to the building’s activities prior to entry and entice passing pedestrians to visit.

On large sites, strategically locate restrooms to be within about a two-minute travel distance from all locations.

Provide space and locations for groups of different numbers to unload from vehicles, assemble and gather prior to entry.

Orient and design outdoor activity spaces to protect people from prevailing winds, hot sun and precipitation.

**Entrances**

The entry to a cultural facility is the point of main introduction. Most cultural facilities have important transitional areas through which access is controlled and where ticketing, coat check and other activities take place.

**Guidelines:**

- It may be desirable to have two main entry points (e.g., one for people arriving by vehicle and one for those arriving on foot or by public transit).
- Provide space and seating for individuals who are waiting for others. Such spaces should be in a location easily detectable from main entries but out of the way of busy traffic.
In large facilities, provide a separate waiting space for groups to assemble and queue up. This space should have some seating for people who need to rest.

Provide amenities like restrooms, drinking fountains and public telephones on the public side of the security perimeter and near waiting spaces.

If facilities are provided for night use by the public when the rest of the building is closed, the entry and exit to that part of the building should be accessible to everyone.

Spatial Organization

In cultural facilities, it is very important to design the building to support wayfinding by new visitors. Not only is it critical to make the resources in the building easy to find but also it is just as important to make the locations of amenities like restrooms intuitively obvious.

Guidelines:

- The main visitor entry should be detectable from public access ways. This is particularly important if the institution has more than one building or is situated on a campus.
- Group amenities like restrooms, drinking fountains, and telephones together. The groupings will serve as important landmarks in the building.
- Provide an information desk immediately inside the entry or in a strategic location in an entry hall.
- Ensure that crowd control devices are detectable by everyone.
Signage Systems

Signage systems help support wayfinding but they should not be depended upon to compensate for a confusing layout. Cultural institutions have a multi-cultural clientele and often many visitors cannot read English.

Guidelines:

- Develop a pictogram system to associate with different parts of the building. This system can be based on the type of resources a building contains. For example, in zoological gardens, the system could display silhouettes of animals. But in a library, it might use images related to the type of literature in an area.
- Signs should be in at least two languages common to the region. English, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, French or Russian may be appropriate in some areas. Internationally known facilities should have major signs in at least English, Spanish, French and Japanese. For other languages, alternate language maps and directories should be provided.
- Use a graphic identity scheme to distinguish one area from another. This could include color family differences and/or display graphics like photographs or banners.

Exhibits and Collections

The resources provided in a cultural facility (e.g., collections, exhibits, lectures) are the primary attraction. Thus, these resources should be made available to the broadest population.

Guidelines:

- Provide alternate media for wayfinding information, exhibits, presentations and background material using Braille, audio,
text and captions. Audio presentation controls should be well marked and easy for anyone to activate.

- Alternate language descriptive material should be provided for all major exhibits and presentations.

- The information desk should have materials available in the alternate media and languages. This may include audio-guided tours, tactile maps, Braille information and text scripts of audio presentations.

- Design exhibits to enable all people to experience them. Where exhibits are interactive, access should be provided at different heights and with knee clearance if approached from the front.

- Provide hands-on access to some objects in each exhibit area where it is appropriate. Controls and devices in such exhibits should be easy to grasp and not require fine motor control unless absolutely necessary for educational reasons.

- The paths through exhibits should be spaced to accommodate wider patterns of use (e.g., adults pushing children in strollers). Avoid dead ends with confined spaces where wheeled mobility devices cannot be turned around.

- Eliminate deep shadows in exhibits that block access to content. The placement of lighting and design of exhibit enclosures are both critical.

- Provide plenty of resting places within exhibit areas.