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## Open Forum for Audio Description Certification October 24, 2022

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### [INTRODUCTION]

**KATHLEEN ZEIDER:** Welcome, everyone. Thank you very much for joining us for this important forum to gather more information. ACVREP believes that all people who are blind or low vision, every individual deserves high-quality services in education, in family life, in community in order to be independent and fully engaged. The tool ACVREP uses is certification to establish that quality standard.

Audio description is absolutely critical for full engagement by individuals, whether it's in educational material, a play, a movie, touring a monument or museum, whether it's a rock concert, or many, many other venues.

The first step in developing this certification is to establish a Subject Matter Expert Committee. The time it takes to develop a quality certification is lengthy, particularly with one as complex as audio description.

ACVREP feels we're very lucky to have Kim Charlson having agreed to chair this Subject Matter Expert Committee, given the depth of her knowledge in audio description. So, with that, I'll turn the forum over to you, Kim.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Thank you, Kathie, and welcome to everyone who has set aside time in their day today to participate in this open forum on audio description. First, I want to explain that due to the way this Zoom session was setup, we will not have video. It's an equal platform for all today, so we will – we are, however, making some other arrangements to access it. But I do apologize that for those who could benefit from the video, we're not able to turn it on. So, we will move forward.

So, as Kathie said, I am Kim Charlson, and I am the Chair of the Subject Matter Expert Committee working on the certification with ACVREP. I wear a lot of other hats in the blindness community. My professional role is as the Executive Director of the Perkins Braille & Talking Book Library in Watertown, Massachusetts. Other advocacy roles that I fill include the immediate past president of the American Council of the Blind and the current president of the World Blind Union North American/Caribbean Region.

So, I have a lot of areas of interest and work in the advocacy community that I do and audio description has always been a passion for me. And working on audio description in all of its various forms, styles, venues is absolutely one of my passions. Which is why I came to the role of chair of this certification committee, because I do believe that anything that we can do to promote the professionalization of those who work in the field in so many different ways is a benefit to all.

So, now some comments on why we're having this open forum today. Until recently, individuals who are blind or have low vision have participated in the audio description process primarily as quality control experts, members of focus groups, reviewers of description written by sighted individuals, or as audio engineers, editors, or as voice talent.

Within the past three to four years, the landscape has evolved and now there are professionals who are blind who are also involved in crafting audio description writing, with the inclusion of the key visual elements required.

This open forum is being held so that the ACVREP Certification Subject Matter Expert Committee can learn more about how this process works from the blind professionals who are doing the work, from those people who are providing training and support for people who are blind or have low vision who are writing description, so we can learn about the various strategies and techniques being used by those working in the field with vision loss.

This forum today is sponsored by ACVREP, and you learned a little bit about that from Kathie earlier, and the Subject Matter Expert Committee. Our task as the SME, I'm going to call us from now on, is to develop criteria for those working in the field of audio description writing. What this certification process does not do is establish criteria for audio editors, engineers, or voice talents, as those professional areas have their own criteria and standards for competence.

Audio description for theater and live events has been around for over forty years. Description for television, films, online content, streaming services, museums, and other venues started to pick up in the 1990's and has more recently, within the last five years, mushroomed exponentially and is continuing to grow every day.

It is time for the professional field of audio description to have a certification process for those professionals with the skills, the knowledge, and the ability to do description work, that there be a credential to help employers know that someone with such a certification has the basic fundamental skills and knowledge to do audio description writing and work.

The Certification Working Committee consists of fifteen individuals from the United States and Canada. It has been meeting nearly every week since late 2019 to develop eligibility criteria, document the body of knowledge and scope of practice for certification, and soon, this work will be finalized and shared with the field during a public comment process scheduled hopefully for Spring of 2023.

Then after that comment period, an expanded team will begin work on development of a certification examination process with accessibility built in.

There is also an Audio Description Advisory Committee chaired by Elizabeth Axel with about a dozen other advisory members. The SME consists of both sighted and blind members, including myself as chair, and I am going to share with you the other members of the SME.

Joyce Adams, Anna Capezzara, Deborah Lewis, Deborah Fels, M. Williams, Celia Hughes, Jan Stankus, Joel Snyder, Jolie Mason, Colleen Connor, Laurie Pape Hadley, Martin Wilde, Mary Hank, and Wendy Sapp.

All of us have been working now for nearly three years to gather and develop information leading to a certification process that works equitably for everyone in applying and receiving such a certification.

Now, about the forum. This forum is scheduled to last for two hours. We have eight presenters who have been identified who wish to address our focus topic of blind or low vision individuals working in the audio description field or those who work with them, and each person will be able to speak for five to seven minutes, sharing highlights and experiences of their particular situation.

We had over ninety people sign up to attend today's forum, which demonstrates the level of interest in this topic in our field.

We have made audio text captions available for today's session and my thanks to Trisha Hicks, who will be assisting us afterwards in preparing a transcript of today's forum. It is also being recorded to share in a couple weeks when the editing is complete, along with the transcript. And that will be made available online. We will post information on the Audio Description Project website at [ADP.ACB.org](http://ADP.ACB.org), and send an announcement to all of today's forum registrants, notifying them of the availability and location of the transcript and recording if you wish to listen to any parts you may have missed or wish to share with others who are interested.

Hopefully, time will allow us to follow-up, following the presenters, for the SME members to ask questions and/or request clarification from presenters. And if time permits, we will also have participant Q&A.

There is a feature in Zoom that has been enabled that's the Q&A button and it kind of works like chat. If you have a question and can use that feature, Joel

Snyder is here monitoring that as well as input from other SME members who may have questions.

Also helping today are Celia Hughes. She is our official timer. And I want to recognize Deb Cook Lewis who is our Zoom host, or as she says, "Zoom Czar," which is just fun to say, and she is the wizard behind our Zoom and making it work the best it can for us today. Again, without video. But thank you, Deb, for your expertise in this area.

So, we encourage anyone listening today who has specific, pertinent thoughts on the focus topic of the open forum to share those thoughts in writing with the SME, send an email to [comments@AVCREP.org](mailto:comments@AVCREP.org) between now and November 1<sup>st</sup> so that we can capture those thoughts and your ideas.

So, without further word from me, I would like to introduce, and each of our panelists will give you a little bit of background on who they are as they share their journey, their story, and their thoughts about audio description and blind professionals in the field of audio description and how they can do that work. So, first up today, I want to welcome Thomas Reid from Pennsylvania. Thank you, Thomas. We're really happy you're here and thank you for being a trooper.

[PRESENTATIONS]

[THOMAS REID]

**THOMAS REID:** No, absolutely, and thank you for inviting me and forgive me for any coughs or sniffles or anything. I'm going to try to avoid all of those. Forgive me for those, ya'll.

So, yes, and thank you, Kim. Thank you, everyone, for the invitation to speak here. I also want to say thank you to Colleen Connor because I know she was a part of this as well, and so thank you for the invitation. So, I wanted to share my thoughts.

So, again, my name is Thomas Reid. I'm a brown-skinned Black man with a shaven, bald head, a neat, full beard, and I'm currently seated in my vocal booth,

and I have a black hoodie on and dark shades. I host and produce a podcast called “Reid My Mind Radio,” which features compelling people impacted by all degrees of blindness and disability. And I also occasionally share my own experiences as a man adjusting to becoming blind as an adult.

I’ve been thinking critically about audio description since my first in-theater experience in 2007. I’ve been to the Hill to advocate for the CVAA back in 2009, 2010, in that area. I produced many episodes on the topic where it’s now a reoccurring season called “Flipping the Script on Audio Description.”

The podcast is just one of the vehicles that has allowed me to be in conversation with lots of blind people. Even before that, I was a very active member of the Pennsylvania Council of the Blind where I served in all sorts of positions, including First Vice President.

In addition to producing the podcast, I’m a freelance audio producer, voice talent, audio description narrator, consultant, and advocate, and I share all of those in order for you to get a real sense of my perspective. And simply put, I fully – fully center blind people in these conversations.

I think a lot about the process of adjusting to blindness as well. Adults who lose their sight in the midst of a career or employment often ask the same question. “What can I do now?” I asked that same question when I became blind. And I know many who are in the blindness rehab field hear that question often and do your best to help and provide answers.

This is one of the things that, well, that concerns me, quite frankly, about audio description being certified through the lens of rehabilitation organization, number one. So, I’ll just add that. It feels sort of contrary to my belief, personally, that audio description is totally better served when it’s viewed as a creative art and not so much as a compliance, form of compliance, a box that needs to be checked.

“What can I do as a blind person?” That was never the question that I think I should have been asking myself. When I worked as an access technology trainer, teaching students and adults to use a variety of equipment, I encouraged many of those I worked with, especially young people, to modify that question.

“What do I want to do and how can I do it as a blind person?”

Those to me are two very different approaches between what can I do as a blind person. The first, what can I do, puts the power in someone else's hands. With the second, it empowers the individual. It encourages adaptations and it doesn't really come with restrictions.

In line with that, I have concerns about certifications overall. I think about who makes up the organizing body? What is their objective? What's their perspective? Is there adequate representation of qualified people of color that represent multiple marginalized communities? I think that's extremely important to consider.

But I know I was asked to specifically speak about the strategies and techniques that blind AD writers incorporate in order to get the information that they need to write description. Now, I personally do not write description for television, film, or live theater, but I've interviewed two individual writers and actually have worked with both on separate projects, Nefertiti Matos Olivares and Robert Kingett, who I know is on the panel, so you'll hear from him.

Nefertiti and I were part of an all-blind A team, blind AD team for a documentary called "Say His Name: Five Days for George Floyd." Nefertiti wrote the script. Serena Gilbert QC'd. Byron Lee, Chris Snyder, they did the mix, and I had the pleasure of narrating. The film and the AD turned out great. Great AD isn't possible without a great script. It creates a retrievable image in my mind, I like to think of it that way, that sticks, right? It's often to the point where I need to recall the date of the film in order to see if I actually saw it with my eyes as opposed to audio description. If it's the latter with audio description, I'm like, wow, that was probably really good AD because I have an image in my mind that sticks.

Nefertiti did that. But the conversation wasn't fully about her ability to craft words. It was about questioning her methods. It was about her process, which to me is an accommodation, and quite honestly, I thought the conversation was really about ableism.

In order to write the script, a blind writer needs access to the information. Between the two folks that I've mentioned, the process includes using a service like AIRA, or compensating someone to provide general access to the visual. The blind writer is tasked both with asking questions and then crafting the sentences

out of the details that they drew out of the sighted assistant. So, to me, it's sort of like an investigative process, right, the details.

*[Wrap-up warning]*

**THOMAS REID:** So, I'm going to really try to jump ahead, because to me, this was – the biggest thing for us to consider right here is that these are accommodations that we're talking about, accommodations that I unfortunately, I think are being overlooked. I think I – I relate the AD writers to those who came before technology, those who came before OCR and e-books, who had personal readers to assist them in getting their degree. And I don't think those degrees are actually in the names of anyone else but that individual who was able to synthesize all of that information and do something and gain their Master's, Bachelor's, PhD, JD, all of these different degrees.

I don't think, again, the question should be really about the blind person, whether or not they can write AD. I think it should be about listening to them, understanding that these are accommodations, and helping to create more tools. And I think that's the – that's the part of the conversation that I'm not hearing because I think the technology is out there to help create tools that can give one access and understand that this is writing, and everyone else who writes, whatever they do, they have assistance of some sort in the process, and I don't think in any case it should be different for a blind person. I'll leave it right there.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Thank you, Thomas. All right.

We will move to Chris Snyder. Chris, welcome, and you have about seven minutes to share your comments.

[CHRIS SNYDER]

**CHRIS SNYDER:** I had my finger on the button. Thank you, Kim, and thank you to the CME for providing this opportunity to speak on this topic which I think is extremely important, particularly to the blind and visually impaired people in the audio description industry or those who would like to become a part of it in the future.

A little background on myself. I started in audio description as an engineer back in 2002 when the first mandate came around, working with Rick Boggs, actually. We, you know, we did a lot of work for the Wonderful World of Disney and back in those days when it was on, doing movies every week.

My first job was an engineer. My second job was as a script QC person after being taught about the principles of audio description and what was considered to be good, objective audio description.

And then I moved on to voiceover, did – my first voiceover was Toy Story, for that. And you know, and that kind of proceeded along until the mandate was repealed. And so – so, I've been involved for a long time in TV and film in particular. And more recently, and my tie to ACV is that I sit on the Board of Blind LGBT Pride International. Proud blind gay guy. And I have done description for our, oftentimes, I have coordinated and produced the description for our movies at the convention.

And so, now I've moved on to a non-profit organization which does audio description for children's illustrated books called Imagination Videobooks. And it's all very fulfilling and I love working in the description field. And I've worn so many hats. Like I said, from QC to voiceover, audio engineer, and talent director and everything in between. And one of the things that I have had rare opportunity to do, but I have done it, is writing audio description myself.

And what that entails for me, the process of – now, let me start with I believe that audio description as a whole is a craft. And by craft, I mean the blending of an art and a science. You follow specific rules. You – you take those rules into account as you craft, as you use your command of the language to create vivid descriptions that help blind people to create a mental picture. And I believe that that is what we do.

And the way that I approached writing the description that I have written is very similar to what Thomas spoke about. This was pre-AIRA, so I had no real technology to do it. But I did have a person with me who was sighted and as Thomas indicated, they acted in the capacity of essentially a reader, an accommodation. And that process was driven by me, the – I was the driving force.

When I heard a space in the show that I felt did not convey enough information to me as a viewer, I stopped the video, I reached out to my reader, my viewer, and I said, what's happening here? Explain to me what's happening on the screen. What do you see? And sometimes we would, you know, we would back it up and we would review it. And I would ask pertinent questions.

You know, there are two people on the screen. What are they doing? Okay, we have to, since they're not named, we have to distinguish them. What are the – what do you see? What color outfit is this person wearing? What color outfit is that person wearing? Does anybody wear a hat? Et cetera.

So, I go through and depending on the importance of this space that had no information for a blind viewer, I would either drill down or make it general. And the piece that I did was actually a mystery, so – so providing details was extremely important and getting those details that were relevant to the clues for figuring out the mystery.

And I believe that that came out very well. I received several compliments from other blind people. And I think that to suggest that a blind person cannot use their command of language, their vocabulary, their ability to create vivid imagery with words because they are blind is ableist at the highest level. It's ableism at the highest level. And we must absolutely provide in this certification process, methods for accommodation for blind audio description writers.

That said, I also believe, and since – since I've done a lot of QC work, I also want to put in that we need standards. We cannot have people novelizing to us, patronizing us, telling us the story, the motivations behind the characters, why they're doing what they're doing, what they're thinking. That kind of behavior is also ableist. It's patronizing. It is – that kind of description is a – basically saying to the blind person, the blind viewer, we don't think you have the intelligence to understand from dialogue and the objective imagery we could convey, what's

actually happening here. So, we're just going to tell you what we think is happening.

And you know, unless you have direct contact with the director or the producer, you don't know. You can't be making those assumptions.

*[Wrap-up warning]*

**CHRIS SNYDER:** Well then, I'll leave it there. I think that's important. Standards are important. Thank you.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Thank you, Chris, very much.

Our next presenter is Lolly Lijewski from Minneapolis, Minnesota. Thank you very much.

[LOLLY LIJEWSKI]

**LOLLY LIJEWSKI:** Thank you, Kim.

I'm taking a little different angle about this but I am also going to speak to some of the points that Thomas and Chris have mentioned. So, my name is Lolly Lijewski. I've been a patron of audio description since the 90's. I had opportunity when the audio description program at Tyrone Guthrie Theater here in Minneapolis was being created, to give feedback on that program. And so, that was a great experience.

Recently this year, I have been doing some training to become a describer. So, I've taken the Audio Description Institute from Joel Snyder which was a fabulous experience. Thank you, Joel. And the Audio Description Training Retreat First Level from Colleen Connor. And both were great experiences, both from the standpoint of the instruction but also from my classmates, who were really

helpful in helping me sort of learn what I think needs to happen for somebody who does this kind of work. And I hope they learned from me as well.

I serve on the Audio Description Project Performing Arts and Museums Committee. As I said, I am new to this. I am learning the skills to do the work. But I have over forty years of experience as an advocate. And I'm a blind person with hearing loss and I have, I think, insights that might be useful.

So, I think this is a natural progression that people who were patrons of audio description are moving or wanting to move into the field to do it. I call it – think of it as audio description or AD 2.0.

The [00:36:47] and organizations like the Washington Ear helped develop the concept and brought it to reality. Now, people for whom it is meant wanted to take their place at the keyboard and behind the mic. This progression is not unusual, nor is the resistance that blind describers are experiencing.

The change process brings creation and innovation, but it brings problems to be solved, discomfort to navigate, and new techniques and strategies to be developed.

There is a model that is used in human service agencies around the country called person-centered model, and what it does, and my own agency that I have worked for, for almost nineteen years now has adopted this, is basically move the way that we think from thinking about doing for someone with a disability to doing with someone with a disability. And it's a bit of a struggle, even for those who have absolutely the best of intentions and have done great work over the years, to make that switch.

Some examples of ways this is lived out in the disability community are deaf interpreters who are – whose work is facilitated by a hearing interpreter so that they can actually speak to their audience or to their participant in their native language. It gives the deaf participant a more realistic experience.

Access assistants are used by many blind professionals in this country. They don't do the job of a blind professional. Whatever that job may be, they facilitate job tasks to make it possible for the person with the disability, in this case, usually the blind person, to do their job. These people have a combination of paraprofessional skills along with professional level skills.

My own access assistant is a paralegal and she could no more do my job than I could do hers, but she gives me help with specific tasks that I need to do my job.

Personal care attendants assist people with physical disabilities with daily cares. They don't live their lives for them. They facilitate the tasks that the person with the disability is then able to do.

Sighted people provide a similar service for blind audio describers. They don't do the work. They provide assistance to enable the blind describer to gather as much information as possible to create the best description for the blind audience. This adds value to the description for whom the – as both blind and sighted perspectives are incorporated.

I call it AD 2.0 because it's unique. It raises audio description to a new level. This level incorporates the blind patrons/describer with input from a sighted describer.

*[Wrap-up warning]*

**LOLLY LIJEWSKI:** To facilitate the blind describer's work. Thank you.

The end product is something we've never experienced previously and, in my view, it's a stronger product because of the collaboration, but never mistake, it's the blind describer who does the work. They have the skills to ask the right questions to elicit the information that is necessary to get the detail to write the description and they also bring their native knowledge of description to the work.

So, I, as my time is fleeting here, I just want to say that this work is something that I think – and the way that people are doing it is something that there is a model for, and I just want to support what Thomas and Chris have said about accommodation, that that's what this is. It's not someone doing the work for you because you need the knowledge to do the work. You can't do it without that. And that's it. Thanks.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Thank you, Lolly, very much. All right.

We'll go ahead to our next speaker. That would be Carl Richardson from Boston, Massachusetts. Carl, there you are. Thank you.

[CARL RICHARDSON]

**CARL RICHARDSON:** Okay, great. My name is Carl Richardson, and I am the Co-Chair of the Audio Description Project along with Kim Charlson. I started out in the field of audio description in the late 90's when I was a working professional for the Media Access Group at WGB8. Did that for a few years, left, and went on to other endeavors as an ADA Coordinator here for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, but I have been an advocate for audio description ever since.

So, I think we're all going to be – end up saying the same thing, but I have a slightly different approach and a slightly different take. First of all, let me say I absolutely do believe that the inclusion of blind professionals in the field of audio description does make for better audio description without a doubt. That is number one. I do totally believe – I listened to a show the other night with Thomas Reid, and you did a great job, and I've heard several things that Chris Snyder as the mixer and engineer and that's great too.

I have a slight difference of opinion when it comes to writing. And – but I – it may be a terminology thing. So, and I'm going to give some, first of all, I as a visually impaired person do kind of want a sighted person to tell me what I'm missing visually, I'll be honest. And I may have a bias because I grew up fully sighted before I lost my sight.

But let me give some quick analogies to see if I can illustrate my point a little better. One, you heard the former speaker talk about the use of deaf consultants in the world of theater. This is a common use best practice. So, hearing interpreters are hired but – and they're the ones that tell the story, tell the story visually in the way that the deaf people, community, can understand, but they consult with deaf people native who understand how deaf people communicate, think, process, and will say, "Oh, that's too English, you need to make it more ASL." Or "That's a concept we don't use in the deaf community."

So, they absolutely have a consultant in the creation of the story being told through the use of American Sign Language, but they're not called interpreters, they're called consultants, editors, whatever.

Secondly, my wife is a writer and an editor sometimes, and when she writes a book, she often hands it off to an editor who – I'm going to use her example as an editor. She just recently collaborated on a book of Irish literature and was asked to edit it for one of our colleagues. And my wife's colleague did all the writing but my wife went at it and looked at it and made writing suggestions, made comments to – to ensure that there was more continuity, to make sure it was more understood by the general reading public because her colleague tends to get overly academic and sometimes talk in terms that may be not understood by the general reading public. But when the book comes out, it doesn't say the book is written by Megan Sullivan. It says it's still written by the author and edited by so and so.

And the last example I'll use is a couple weeks, my wife and I went hot air ballooning. A couple weeks ago, my wife and I went hot air ballooning. And we were up about 2,000 feet. And there was a lot to describe in that you could see from – it was a beautiful, clear day. You could see for miles and miles and miles. So, it's lots to describe. Farmland, roads, roadways, riverways. She didn't know where to begin and where to end.

And so, at first, I got overwhelmed with the amount of audio description she would give me, so I said, Megan, this is what I would want. This is what would make sense to me as a blind and visually impaired person. This is the perspective I need and this is how I think you can better tell me what you're audio describing.

And she listened to my feedback for a few minutes and then retold the – redid the audio description of the experience and the trip in a way that was much – now, I gave her an incredible amount of feedback and added in a consultant to make her be able to tell the story that was the way I understood, much like Chris was saying, inquiring questions, but she still did the audio describing. It's just – she did.

So, I think I would feel slightly better if – I absolutely believe the blind individual should be involved in the writing process, absolutely. But I see it more in the consulting and editing capacity rather than the actual writing from the beginning.

And I hear what you say about accommodations such as AI and AIRA and frankly, I wouldn't use AI to describe most of the imagery that I see and I'm not sure I would even use AIRA – because first of all, my degree is in film and television. Maybe another bias there. I'm not sure I want an AIRA agent who may not understand the language of film. And film and television have their own language to describe what's being said.

So – but do I think a blind person can consult and edit and give them guidance and say this is what works for us, that doesn't work for us, please, rephrase this in a way, please let me help you write it in a different way? Absolutely. So, I see them more in an editing and consulting capacity and I would love that if they were involved in every single project.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Thank you, Carl, for your comments.

All right. Our next presenter is Robert Kingett, correct? I hope I pronounced that correctly. I've seen your –

**ROBERT KINGETT:** Correct.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Oh, good. I've seen your name a lot and I'm very interested to hear what you have to say. So, go ahead. Thank you.

[ROBERT KINGETT]

**ROBERT KINGETT:** Sure. So, I'm a blind audio description writer. I have written many scripts for trailers and I have written audio description scripts for movies and **super fast (ph)** and more. The process has been iterated previously but I would like to outline how I do it.

Typically, how I do it is I get a core group of friends that have a film background, usually about three or four, and I try to get differing genders and ethnicities to round out the visual descriptions they give me. And then I craft a carefully worded script that matches up with all three or four of their perceptions.

That takes a lot of work, it truly does. It's not hands-off. You have to be very cognizant of your biases. You have to be very, very aware of the – of words and how to use your words carefully, nouns, verbs, and adjectives, and what goes with what genre and what goes with what scene.

I work for a collective called Social Audio Description where we actually don't even try to be objective when it comes to describing things because we don't live in an objective world, so why should we try to be objective when it comes to media. Everybody has their own biases, privileges, and/or areas of life that we just simply don't know.

However, on the other side of the coin, me as a blind audio description writer, I know what the audience is going to look for when they watch this movie. I have a pretty good idea of what needs to go where because I can't see it. I know what needs to be articulated because I cannot see it myself. So, I have an understanding of what to describe, whereas a sighted describer might be relying on their vision a little bit too much. This kind of goes back to the interrogating your biases.

It's very important that blind people with the skill of writing and editing, it's very important that we recognize their talents as part of a team and not doing anything differently or offhandedly. Maybe me as a blind audio describer, maybe I know the right nuance to put into that description that a person that is solely relying on their vision might not know.

So, and lastly, I just would like to say I truly think that you do need a background in some sort of writing or editing capacity. I think that writing courses would really, really help in crafting these scripts.

But my scripts are lush. They are the eyes for the person that needs the service. And one of the best compliments I have received is a blind consumer approached me and they told me, they said, you knew exactly what to describe that would paint a picture for me. And that is why I really, really do think that blind

individuals can write audio description, because I am proof of it, along with Nefertiti. So, thank you.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Thank you. Thank you, Robert.

And Nefertiti's name has come up a couple times. I just wanted to let people know that she was not able to participate in this open forum today but has committed to send her written comments and thoughts on the subject. So, we will take her feedback and her input as part of this learning process for the Subject Matter Expert Committee, so.

Now I want to recognize our next two speakers who are going to speak a little bit at a little bit of a different angle, I think, from the previous presenters, and that is, I believe, from the perspective of an ally of the blind or low vision audio description professional and involved with working with blind professionals in the field of audio description work.

So, we'll hear first from Nathan Ruggles from Pennsylvania, I believe.

[NATHAN RUGGLES]

**NATHAN RUGGLES:** Yes, I'm from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

So, first, so, audio description, it doesn't start the moment one steps up to a mic on the day of a theatrical performance and end when the headphones come off after curtain. In fact, most of the work is outside of the show, and preparation isn't just a weekend workshop after which one can call themselves an audio describer. It involves mentorship and ongoing training.

So, yes, my name is Nathan Ruggles. I am an – I've been an audio describer for over seven years. I write and voice description for live theatrical performance, including plays, musicals, opera, dance, displays, museums, more. I was this year's recipient together with the Prime Stage Theatre Pittsburgh of the 2022 Audio Description Project's Audio Description Achievement Award in the Performing

Arts. And I bring to this work a background in theater training and professional stage acting, broadcast radio, arts administration, professional advocacy work, and years of experience in radio rating services for the blind and visually impaired prior to my audio description.

So, I will be primarily addressing and discussing my work in live performance, focusing on the topic questions listed for this session, but informed by some of the comments today. So, looking at my workflow, it begins long before I describe. It involves training and ongoing training, not just in audio description but in writing, in voice, in listening to audio description, both good and bad, and understanding the medium I'm describing, in this case, theater, as well as changes and developments in industry.

It continues the moment I have contact with a new client or have a date of a performance for which I will be providing AD. It is educating new clients on what it is and why it is important. It's taking existing clients on a journey to expand their AD service offerings. It's ensuring ongoing clients maintain quality and continually improve. It's advising them or even performing marketing, publicity, and audience development, with keeping in mind connecting clients with the blind and visually impaired community, both current audience members as well as potential audience members. It's keeping the focus with them and in the work on the patron experience from the moment they make the decision to purchase tickets or contact the organization via the website or phone. It's also setting the expectations for patrons of what the experience will be like and include.

It's ensuring the ticket purchasing experience is accessible, as well as websites, emails, social media content. It's ensuring braille and large print programs. Box office and other staff understand the service and how to interact with individuals who are blind or visually impaired. It's about ensuring devices are reserved ready and those distributing them know how they work and can instruct patrons.

Working with the cast and crew, if possible, attending the very first rehearsal, the read through, or otherwise at some point, introducing yourself to the cast and crew, explaining what you do, respecting the actors, the director, and the production and their process and their space and time, but being prepared to educate them and advocating for yourself and your ultimate client, the patrons, in your requests for what you need to do your job and do it right.

Setting up appointments to speak with designers about their work, explain to the cast what Actor Voice ID is, how they will be both recording it as well as providing it live to an audience, and making sure they don't spoil the show with what they say. Also, finding out from them essentials such as how they pronounce their names and that of their character, their pronouns, their self-described race, ethnicity, background, or other identity.

It's developing a template for your introductory notes and pre-show intermission notes and conclusions, including explanations of how to use the devices, what to do if you need assistance, what you will be doing as a describer, the playbill, poster description, contents of the playbill, the theater space, not just the stage, the actors. And a personal pet peeve of mine is the default is not white for actors. All actors need described and what they look like.

Characters, costumes, sets, set changes, props, lighting, sound. In case there's a question of where sound is coming from, if it's not apparent. If a door is opening, which door is it?

Choreography, stage conventions, are props right there on stage or are they mimed throughout the show?

Also, holding descriptions to intermission when possible and if possible. Production staff, director's notes, funders, special thanks. Also making sure you get that curtain call and talking about future productions.

You need to read the script. You attend as many rehearsals as necessary. Take photos of actors, costumes, sets, props, writing completely descriptions, attending rehearsals to understand how those elements come together, looking for those important visual moments, actions, sight gags, especially those that elicit either a collective laugh or a gasp from the audience that must be explained because no one wants to be not included in the joke or not know who was just punched on stage.

Outside the rehearsal, examining that script, mapping the pauses, finding them if need be where you can insert that phrase or word that might be key without talking over the actors. Recording your introductory notes. Working with the technical staff to share equipment as ready, working with the cast and crew to

prepare the touch tour, selecting those key props, costumes, fabrics, and items for patrons to hold and touch.

During a live onstage preshow, preparing to walk a stage while describing and both solicit and answer questions from audience members.

During the show, speaking clearly, following along with the script, not interpreting or editing, objectively describing what you see. After the show, talking with patrons.

*[Wrap-up warning]*

**NATHAN RUGGLES:** Soliciting their feedback, contributing to patron surveys for that purpose. Thanking people after the show, integrating and implementing learning from patrons as well as cast, crew, and staff, being humble and inquisitive, open to constructive criticism, striving to improve and learn.

As a sighted describer, I want to echo what some have said. The focus needs to be on the patron. I may talk during the show but outside of the show, I need to listen to other talent, colleagues, advisors, audience members who are blind or visually impaired, integrate with – and make sure they're integrated in the quality control process, get feedback/advice during and after the process.

My two guiding principles are commitment to all of the above and being collaborative with artists, organizations, patrons, and blind and visually impaired advisors and colleagues.

Also, mentorship. If we put new describers out into the world without requiring mentorship, it is a disservice to the client, their organizations, and describers, patrons, and the whole world of audio description. I learned through mentorship. New trainees need to be shown how its done and get feedback as well.

My final thought is, based upon what I heard today, I am curious about the division between those who write and those who voice. In my work, those two go hand in hand. No one could ever simply step into a booth and voice the audio description for a live performance without having done all the work beforehand

to prepare and understanding how the standards of training and conduct need to be integrated. AD certification with the expectation that someone will be writing for a live performance requires addressing how to voice as well as write and vice versa. Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Thank you. Thank you, Nathan. Thank you very much.

All right. And next we'll hear from Roy Samuelson who is a voice talent, trainer, describer. He has many hats. I'm sure he'll share some of his credentials with us as well. Thank you, Roy, for presenting to us today.

[ROY SAMUELSON]

**ROY SAMUELSON:** Thanks so much. So, Roy Samuelson, founder of the Audio Description Network Alliance, [theADNA.org](http://theADNA.org). It's a database of AD talent roles and a library of over 150 audio interviews of AD professionals. And while I've voiced thousands of AD scripts that were written for me, I have primarily corresponded with film and TV AD companies on their process and also shared the advantages of including blind pros at all levels.

Today I am speaking because I've hired blind AD teams for the Oscar nominated film that was previously mentioned by Thomas as well as other series, by including AD writers who are blind. And there are still so many assumptions about AD, particularly about what AD writers do in film and TV. Additionally, there is some confusion about the role blind AD writers play in the process.

So, let's start with subjectivity, that any AD writer, blind or sighted, would likely say capturing the visuals is obviously a job skill of the role, but as you've heard, it's a small part of the writing process. Writing AD is not all technical. This is not transcription. Transcription is moving exact words of audio to the written word.

In the same way that you can't say, oh, this is a bad poem, I hate it, or this is a good poem, it's – AD writing is subjective. Of course, you can say it's a bad poem or a good poem. That's the subjective part of it. But you can't say for sure that it's always a bad poem by everyone.

The goal is to paint a picture, not spew facts. It's relevance. It's the visual material captured, yes, but is it being captured in the best way? What's important? Carve out the crap. AD writing is conceptualizing then curating. What's the story or message of the visuals? Writing is craft and creativity. Craft has come up several times in these conversations. It's context, it's editing, tone, language choice, and so much more.

Blind people have used AD more than sighted people, so that immersion provides an expertise toward knowing what they need and what works and what doesn't work. That overshadows assumptions that sighted AD writers have. So, right there is a big advantage.

In the same way that sighted people use tools like a keyboard to type and the internet for research, blind writers can use a sighted person as a tool.

Now, I apologize for the terrible term I'm about to share but I shared this a few months ago. Visual access aggregator. It shows the role of gathering visual information as part of the writing process, not in its entirety. And with that, it is all teamwork.

I didn't grow my own voiceover career by myself. I collaborated with many other professionals, voiceover talents, producers, mentors, coaches, advisors, engineers, consultants, and so many more. No one grows their career in a vacuum. No one does their job in a vacuum. Sighted AD writers collaborate with others as Robert has mentioned, as well as others.

Blind AD writers collaborate too, and just because it may be a different kind of collaboration, it is yet another form of professionalism.

Giving a quote here from Judy Heumann. "Independent living isn't doing everything by yourself. It's being in control of how things are done."

One of the questions that I'd like to ask the Certification Committee is asking to name what you are certifying. We have faced barriers in hiring blind professional talents with the catchall term "describer."

I understand the catchall term describer is convenient shorthand that works in theater, museums, educational, and corporate AD content which is part of your certification process. Those usually have one person performing multiple roles.

While I understand your certification is for more than just film and TV AD, that segment has over 8,400-plus titles, a clear quantity leader for opportunities for blind people, both up and comers and working pros. And as far as the creation of AD, film and TV AD has multiple roles that people can do.

Now, I've shared publicly and privately with many individuals, the challenges of that word, "describer." It may feel clunky or tedious to separate out the AD roles like AD writer, AD voice, director, casting, editing, mixing, quality control, and more, particularly if one person is doing more than one role, but that word, it creates a barrier for both up and coming and working professionals who are blind, who see AD as something I can't do because I can't see the visuals.

Any organization that perpetuates that will hold back the beautiful, creative, crafted, amazing work that blind people can contribute to this. So, I plead – beg you – to please consider multiple terms for the roles of AD instead of that catchall term, describer, so that more blind people can know that they too have equal opportunities.

Because there are limited opportunities for training or work, as far as I know, there's only a few notable blind writers. They did their job. They shared their experience. And yet, they are prodded and poked and challenged as to, how did you do that? And the question isn't coming from a place of curiosity. It's coming from a place of doubt of their abilities.

No blind professional should be put in the discriminatory position of having to defend how they did something, yet judgements have been publicly made about AD writers who are blind without having ever heard their work. It's got to be exhausting and demanding of them beyond what sighted people are put through.

This work was created for blind people and by blind people. Thank you, Rick Boggs, wherever you are, for that turn of phrase. And I've shared it far and wide. Blind people should work in it.

One of my agendas of hiring blind AD writers was deliberate to pave the way to open the space even more, but as Thomas mentioned, our writer was put in a terrible position of having to choose either publicly prove herself by how she did it, which takes away from the quality of the work she did, and she's put in the position of requiring to defend her work that no sighted AD writer I know of has

been put in that position. Or she stands back and lets the work speak for itself, which could be misconstrued as her holding back information from other blind people who want to learn, a form of gatekeeping, limiting the accessibility resources of up-and-coming blind AD writers, simply because the blind writer doesn't want to have to defend her work.

The prejudgment of, "Oh, they're a blind AD writer? Well, I have to hear it first." Is something that no sighted AD writer would be asked.

If I could make one point, I would caution against the use of a person's blindness to hold them to a higher standard. I'd like to make the case to figure out how to certify, of course, but the answer is not we can't or let's do it differently for blind people. If someone makes the case why blind AD writers can't write AD, it's a terrible case to make. Saying blind people are not qualified to do something that is created for them excludes them from being part of the process, and I applaud all who continue to make the case for yes and finding the yes.

So, here's the call to action that I'd like to ask the Certification Committee. I've used my privilege to reach out to filmmakers and producers to show them not only the merits of AD for their work but also the importance of blind AD teams. I've been trusted and I've been able to hire and others have hired blind AD writers and have had positive experiences, results, and understandings.

This panel, as I'm sure, in many meetings you've listened to blind pros like today who have done this work. You've done the right thing by asking blind writers with this forum. And I know of only a handful of individuals and organizations already providing AD training of all kinds. I'm sure they've shared with you their experience working with blind AD writers. But today you've heard concerns and suggestions from blind pros. Hearing them and listening, check.

Are you understanding and are you taking action? I'm asking from a – and making sure that you ask from a place of curiosity and not judgment, to make the case for why blind writers do this work without having to single them out or separate them from sighted AD writers.

I'd like to ask to hire and pay AD writers for the value of their experience and expertise that they share with you. Blind writers have had so many people asking

of them, demanding their help in consulting. They've fought so many battles and are now being asked even more. Pay them and pay them for their expertise.

And finally, I'd like to ask you to follow-up to this forum for all of us to understand the specific actions that you're taking that results from today's forum. Will you commit to that, at the end of this year, to share your actions you've taken or give us a deadline of when we can?

And finally, I would like to ask all those involved in AD, blind or sighted, to lead by example and collaboration. Take the privilege, the platform, and the opportunities that you have and model them for others. Invite others along the way with your integrity and with your professionalism. Anything less is likely to be construed as self-serving and frankly, just talk for your own self-promotion.

I'm available and interested in following up with anyone here on opportunities I can use with my platform to grow what needs to be done. And if you are a blind professional, support others who are working for this cause.

## [QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION]

**KIM CHARLSON:** Thank you. Thank you, Roy.

So, next, what I will do is turn to Joel Snyder, who was monitoring email, chat, between the SME if there were any areas of clarification or people wanted to circle back for clarification from any of the speakers who are still here on the forum as of right now.

So, Joel? Thank you.

## [QUESTION #1]

**JOEL SNYDER:** Yeah. There are a couple of comments so far from the audience or from people who are registered to attend. One anonymous attendee asks, "Would you recommend that there be some sort of standards certification for

those who act as a resource providing accommodations for blind audio describers? Would these individuals providing accommodations be paid?”

**KIM CHARLSON:** Well, that’s a good question. And I would be delighted to open it up to any of our presenters to share thoughts. And that’s why the Subject Matter Expert team is here, to take those types of questions and to float them out there to any of you who might wish to respond to that.

And there have been – we have received input on the concept of should the person that is working with a blind describer/writer have some, you know, have some skillsets. And you know, I think all of the people who are working, writing, crafting description have all indicated they do rely on people. They sift through many – I like the way that Robert described it, as sifting through, you know, very diverse input from several people, which I think sounds like it makes your description richer because of that level of degree.

I don’t know that anybody out there who is trying to get input is just taking, you know, any sighted person who walks in the room. But I would very much like to hear either Robert, Roy, Chris, Thomas, anyone who would like to comment.

I know you have thoughts, so that would be great if you would share. Otherwise, we’ll certainly take the question back and try to delve on it further, but we do have some time to share. So, I would encourage you.

**ROBERT KINGETT:** I have some thoughts.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Oh, that sounds great, Robert. Go ahead.

**ROBERT KINGETT:** Yeah, so, I – I do think that I don’t necessarily think that the visual aide should be certified to the degree that the describer is, but I do think that there should be fair compensation to the aide as well.

My only hesitation for the certification is that I just – I would need to think about the certification because I go back to what makes a certified ASL interpreter, and

then translating that certification over to a visual medium. It's not language, per se. It's more art. So, that will require a lot of thinking on my part.

**CHRIS SNYDER:** This is Chris. I agree with Robert. I think also that we have to kind of look at the realities of the situation in terms of what companies are willing to pay for writers, because that does enter into the process. And the people that we bring in to help us, our visual aides, as Robert aptly called them, they are people that we trust, that we work with well, that we can synthesize information easily with.

And while I do think there should be compensation, it's important to keep in mind that the reality is that most of the companies that create audio description – I'm sorry – that require audio description, network television, cinema, they have a certain amount that they're willing to pay. And there's not a whole lot at this point in time that can be done about what they feel the appropriate price for description is. That is another – that's a whole different can of worms. But it's something that we have to consider so as not to diminish the compensation of blind writers versus cited writers, if that makes some sense.

So, that's where I'm at with it. And as far as certification goes, if we certify visual aides in the way that we certify describers, there could be those out there who would then, as Roy pointed out, say, well, they're just the ones actually doing the describing. The blind person really isn't doing it. And that's a whole different problem. We don't want to have that situation either.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Good feedback. Thank you, Chris.

**LOLLY LIJEWSKI:** Kim, this is Lolly. I agree with what Robert and Chris were saying. I think there should be compensation for the assistant. I prefer that to aide. And I think – but I agree that I think if they're certified, first of all, to me, someone who does this could benefit from a little bit of training but they don't necessarily need – you kind of want them to understand what you're looking for but you don't necessarily want them to be certified at that same level or trained

to that same level because, as they said, as Chris just said, then they're doing – the question would be, who is doing the work?

And so, from my perspective, I think having some – some training in terms of what writing and describing entails would be beneficial. I don't see it being to the degree that people who go into this field get trained and are, you know, doing the work.

And the certifying of the writers and describers, in terms of the pay issue that Chris raised, I have experience with accessibility coordinators, and one of the things that we've done where I live is we've been trying to get coordinators certified because we're again trying to elevate the job so that people understand what's involved in it and that it gets the credit that it's due. And I think the same thing is true of the writer or describer, like Roy's kind of sorting those roles out.

That you – that the certification can help with professionalizing, with making sure that there can become a standard of pay. Those sorts of issues can be addressed through certification. But you – but I don't agree that it should be at the same level. And I don't even think it necessarily has to be certification. I would say training would be good.

And right now, where we are is most folks don't have that. Unless you find someone who does, basically you train them yourself and that's kind of how it works right now. So, thanks.

**ROBERT KINGETT:** Yeah, training absolutely for the assistants.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Great. Good feedback. Thank you. Anyone else want to weigh in from our panelists? All right, I'm going to go back to Joel and see if we have any other questions from participants.

[QUESTION #2]

**JOEL SNYDER:** Hi, Kim. Yeah, we do. We do. And I would note that we have a fair number, so we might want to be cognizant of that as we respond to each one.

The next, just in order of submission, the next comment/question I have is from Sam Gould. “Mr. Thomas Reid framed his discussion about AD from the artist/practitioner lens. What value might there be in moving toward that lens in the industry of film, TV, and theater? What impact could that have for more blind persons moving into administrative positions in those industries? What might be compromised or risked to move toward the industry lens and beyond the compliance system?”

**KIM CHARLSON:** That is a powerful question, or a number of questions, for sure. I’d be particularly interested, and I’m going to pick a person this time. I’m going to pick Roy to respond to this because I think of the people who have presented today, you have, I think, the closest and most recognized link to industry, not as, you know, working with so many varied industry providers, so, and content providers. So, I’m wondering if you had anything to say about Sam’s very interesting question?

**ROY SAMUELSON:** Sure, and just to be super clear, I only solely work in TV and film AD, so a lot of the experience is outside of museums, et cetera. I threw that at ninety miles an hour, so that could have been missed.

I did have a little bit of a glitch. May I ask you to please repeat the question? I’ve had some audio problems but I think they’re resolved now.

*[Joel repeats the question]*

**ROY SAMUELSON:** I think there’s advantages on both sides. And as we talked about with the subjectivity of the writing that Robert did – and I know that Colleen Connor has her Audio Description Training Retreats, Joel, you have your institute as well – there is no official textbook that can be applied to every single

piece of work, specifically in film and TV. Each has similarities. There's a ton of overlap but with this work, I find that, you know, there is the necessity of the mandate, that that has gotten us some really great places.

But what I'm noticing happening now, specifically with the streaming services, is that regardless of the back behind the scenes things that are happening, these streaming services are recognizing the opportunity that there are blind audiences providing them as far as untapped market.

And I will not discount the importance and the value and the necessity of including blind people in this work, but there's also another side to it, the professionalism side, and I think a lot of these questions have been answered in the film industry where you see that certain professionals get paid and work regularly in the business because they've proven their mettle. I see some incredible writers that are on this – not only this panel but also attendees who have proven their mettle and are being hired regularly and being referred to. It's – Bridget Melton, I'm going to do a little shout out there. She has gone from live describing to film and TV effortlessly because of the skills that she brings. I'm naming her among many examples.

Robert has been collaborating with Social Audio Description and has given a name for himself. Again, with Colleen, the work that she has done, there are professional writers in TV and film that are working constantly because they've taken her course. That tells me something. That tells me that these companies, in the pressure of time and the limited budget, which needs to come up, all of these things are happening because there is a respect for the work.

As blind professionals get the experience and training – and I'm talking way too much. I feel like, you know, especially since I yacked off, maybe Thomas or Chris or someone else should step in. But the important is, by making that comparison, it legitimizes this work, it gives the value to this work, and it makes sure that our blind professionals are compensated fairly in comparison to sighted people. And I'm done.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Thank you, Roy. I do want to give Chris an opportunity. He was the other person I recognized as having some connections with industry for many,

many years. And in the absence of Rick Boggs, and I know, not to disregard Thomas, but I do know he wasn't feeling well. So, he really put forth himself to speak at all and I now, I want to give him the chance to rest and recover. But Chris, do you have anything you want to add?

**CHRIS SNYDER:** Well, I do think, since Thomas framed the question, I think it would be awesome to hear from him. I would simply say, as somebody who has been in this industry and dealt with, you know, several different networks and streaming services and everything throughout the years, that you get a wide range of people who are doing the description coordination on that level. And many of them, unfortunately to this day, still see it as a box to check. And it is a – it is a matter solely of compliance to them. And I mean, I can't tell you some of the ugly things that have come across my ears from these people when you start talking about quality, when you start talking about inclusion. I mean, they don't want to hear it, some of them. They act as though it's not important.

And so, I think that shifting the conversation, as Thomas suggested, is, in my opinion, a net good. I think it's a net benefit to the industry as a whole and for blind describers and other blind people who work in the field as well. And that's all I'm going to say. I hope Thomas has something to say as well.

**KIM CHARLSON:** He gave us his best, you know. So, he's dropped off the call. But recognizing that he did start that conversation I think is important to acknowledge.

All right, Joel. Another question?

**JOEL SNYDER:** Sure.

**KIM CHARLSON:** These are big ones.

[QUESTION #3]

**JOEL SNYDER:** Sure. Martin asks, “What other tech tools would Thomas like to use or would like to see developed?” Of course, Thomas is not on the call. Maybe someone else can address that.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Yeah. And I would turn to our blind writers of description who are working in the field, maybe. I mean, AIRA was mentioned several times and I think there’s plusses to that. I think we said there were plusses and minuses, all of us, who know the strengths and the limitations of what AIRA can do.

They have had training. I know AIRA agents do receive training in audio description. Not, you know, not a full-fledged course, but some training. So, but yes, does somebody have some comments?

**CHRIS SNYDER:** I would say this and then I’ll leave it for other people, but I would just – I would only say the tools we have, if used in a very judicious way and in a – a way that – it’s all about the writer’s, the describer’s level of ease of access, okay. So, could AIRA work? Yes. In some cases, would it be better to share – screen share on Zoom with your assistant, as Lolly called them? Yes. I mean, there are different applications of present tech that we could use.

The one thing I agree with Carl on – my apologies, Carl – I do think blind writers belong in this industry but the thing I agree with you on is I’m a little hesitant about AI describing because oftentimes, as you can see with the technology we have as screen reader users, it can really get it wrong. And I wouldn’t be an advocate of that until we come a lot further with that technology.

But I do think that the screen sharing tech and the use of AIRA and another human, as long as humans are involved in the visual process, I’m okay. I’m okay with it.

**ACB MEDIA: DEB:** Kim, you do have a comment from Satauna with her hand raised if you do want to acknowledge it.

**CARL RICHARDSON:** This is Carl real quick in response to Chris. When you say using AI judiciously, like, if I was going to use AIRA, I would think – let's say you're using a ninety-minute film. I would think they would have to watch the whole ninety-minute film with you because something may show up visually later that is a reference to something that – like a flashback or something that was a reference to something earlier. And how are they going to help the blind writer/consultant/whatever you call them connect the dots if they don't have the context of the whole entire piece?

**CHRIS SNYDER:** I agree with you. I agree with you entirely.

**CARL RICHARDSON:** Okay, okay. We're probably more in agreement. We just have to figure out how to get there. I'm glad there's at least one thing you agreed with me on, Chris.

**CHRIS SNYDER:** I'm sorry, I just – I do believe that we belong in the writing process and not as a consultant. I think we can write it. But the thing that you say, when I said judiciously, what I mean by that is not sparingly but in a thoughtful way. If you don't get a good AIRA agent when you start off and they're not giving the information that you seek, obviously you would want to call back and get someone else. That's what I mean. I mean, you have to make sure that the tools you're using are working for you and working with your process of creating the description. That's what I meant by judiciously. My apologies.

**CARL RICHARDSON:** Okay, thank you. Thank you for that clarification.

**ROBERT KINGETT:** And you wouldn't have to have an AIRA agent watch the whole entire movie. I mean, you could take notes on the silent parts. You can take copious notes on context and things like that. So, the AIRA agent doesn't have to watch the whole entire movie.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Good point, and I think Chris also, the whole concept of Zoom and screen sharing with, you know, a trusted colleague of some kind makes a lot of sense as well. So, that's a good strategy right there.

Joel, more questions?

**JOEL SNYDER:** Sure. I think Deb mentioned that Satauna had a hand up.

**SATAUNA HOWERY:** Hello. Thanks for letting me unmute here.

Somebody asked about what tools blind folks might want developed. I would argue that the tools aren't the purview of this particular SME. It's a valid question and a valid discussion but in terms of how we write, unless the SME is going to make recommendations to a broader industry base around tools, it's – it's not quite relevant to this discussion.

The issue here seems to me to be one of trust. Do sighted people always get the context right? Do they always prioritize the most appropriate elements and use clear, concise language to create description? I would answer no. And do you trust that a blind or low vision writer has a process in place to make this work?

In terms of watching an entire film, I have not done direct writing of description from scratch, but I have done a ton of quality control, sometimes to the point of just rewriting entire scenes, because this industry is, like Chris mentioned, so "check the box" that it doesn't really matter in some of these companies who's writing. They'll just put anybody in there who already works there who's interested in doing it because it's cheap and convenient and it works for them. That person doesn't have any training or anything and so, I don't know that that necessarily matters.

But when I talk to an AIRA agent, I know the context. It's my responsibility to articulate the context and articulate what is it that I want to know. And to be able to ask the right questions to elicit the information that I'm after. And I think that's just anybody who's going to write has to do that and anybody who is going to write, blind or sighted, has to prioritize and pick and choose and be able to put all that together. Thank you for listening.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Thank you, Satauna. Thanks.

**CHRIS SNYDER:** Completely agree.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Yeah, no, it's a good comment for sure.

[QUESTION #3.5]

**CARL RICHARDSON:** This is Carl, real quick to Satauna's thing about how it should be up to the blind writer to decide what information to give out. So, I actually have a friend that's a fairly prominent movie director and I just recently told him about audio description. And he's like, wait, I want to work with the writer since it's my telling of the story. I want to choose what the audio describer says because I'm already choosing what's being portrayed visually. What about that argument?

**CHRIS SNYDER:** That argument, Carl, I can speak to directly because we've had situations like that. I'm sure Joel could probably speak to the same thing. It is a good – always good and writers, if they have access to a director, of course – of course they'll take the director's views into account. But the director should not have full creative control of that process. They should be allowed to contribute if they so choose.

Most often, we get the media after it's been [01:40:58].

**CARL RICHARDSON:** Yeah, most often they're not involved. I agree.

**CHRIS SNYDER:** And it's not really a valid – a way – what I mean is it's not really a valid way to – to view it because you can't – you can't access that director and ask them questions. On the occasions where you can, I'm absolutely for it, provided that they don't try to exert complete creative control over description, because they – whether or not they created the film is beside the point. They don't know what elements we need in audio description.

**CARL RICHARDSON:** Okay, I'll give you that. Okay.

**KIM CHARLSON:** All right. I want to hop back to Joel because I know we have a lot of questions. Thanks.

**JOEL SNYDER:** I'm sorry. Yes. Nathan – oh, he had a hand up.

**NATHAN RUGGLES:** Yeah, I'm sorry, just real quick, just on the note about the director having creative control. And if I could shift it over to live performance or in terms of the artist and the context of, for instance, visual art.

I love it and I fight sometimes to get to be able to consult with the artists, right, like the live performance which I think I discussed in my remarks a little bit. All the designers, whether it's for lighting, whether it's for sets, right. I want to hear from them, right. Or I want to hear from the artist.

But at the same time, for instance, in visual art, a lot of visual artists are terrible describers of their own art in terms of what that means for audio description. And there's various reasons for that. Part of it is use of technical language often or they just – they just – so, I think it can – I just want to echo what was said, what Chris said, that, you know, they can inform the work, right, and if they're

available, that's wonderful. But yeah, I would find it challenging if they had creative control.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Yeah. All right. Thanks, Nathan. Joel?

[QUESTION #4]

**JOEL SNYDER:** Okay. From Fran, "Thanks to everyone for their wonderful presentations today. Are you envisioning your certification to be North American specific or could it have a more global application?"

That might be good for Kathie or Kim.

**KIM CHARLSON:** That's a good question. I think I can respond to that. We have right now, representation on the Subject Matter Expert Committee from the US and Canada. We have broader representation on our Advisory Committee but we are looking at the certification as, at this point, English language and an international certification. So, Joel?

[QUESTION #5]

**JOEL SNYDER:** Okay. The next comment/question comes from Stacia (ph). Have any of the panelists who are blind written description for a museum audio described tour experience? And if so, how is their workflow/process different from writing for film or video?

**CHRIS SNYDER:** Robert.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Good question. Robert, have you done museums or is it mostly film? Or shorts or?

**ROBERT KINGETT:** I'm sorry, could you repeat the question?

**KIM CHARLSON:** It was have you done any work with museum exhibit audio description or is most of your work with media?

**ROBERT KINGETT:** Most of my work is with pre-recorded media.

**KIM CHARLSON:** That's what I thought, yeah.

**CHRIS SNYDER:** I've done some QC on it and I will say that it is a little different because – well, there's a few things that are vastly differently, one of which is that most of the time, you have plenty of time to describe your – the piece. You don't have to get it in between dialogue, you know. It's a physical item you can describe, if that's a painting or a sculpture or something like that. And so, you have the ability to expand your description significantly.

But as far as the general like, principles, the general idea of description itself, you know, obviously a good describer will keep their interpretations of the media to a minimum and allow you to draw your own interpretation as is intended in most art. That's what I would say about it, is that you have – the factor of time constraints is mostly eliminated.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Good. All right. We'll go to another question, Joel.

**JOEL SNYDER:** Okay. I think this is more a comment from Nathan. It would be, “Indeed, few things more frustrating than working with those who think of AD as simply a box to check, as Chris Snyder said.”

**KIM CHARLSON:** Here, here.

[QUESTION #6]

**JOEL SNYDER:** And the next is a question from Ruth Kahn (ph). “Are there specific criteria for what audio description assistants do?”

**KIM CHARLSON:** So, I – there might be. I know certainly people who use them probably have criteria for who they want to have help and who they don’t want to have help. So, but, as of in our subject matter expert committee at this point, we have not developed any kind of criteria for that role.

Robert, Chris, others?

**ROBERT KINGETT:** I was just going to say that me personally, I have quite a bit of criteria, so nobody gets – no random person gets to be my assistant. You have to go through a vetting process. So, that’s it.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Great. That’s good to know. I’m sure we’d like to hear about some of that maybe offline and/or submitting comments. That would be very helpful. Good. All right. Yeah. Joel?

[QUESTION #7]

**JOEL SNYDER:** Sure. And the last item I have is from Martin. No recommendations regarding the technical tools. He was simply curious about what those tools might be. All processes are valid. And beyond that, I do not see any other questions or comments, unless people want to put them forward now in the Q&A.

**LOLLY LIJEWSKI:** Kim, this is Lolly. Just want to respond to this last one. I think that's a really open area at this point. I think we have – this is so new, in a sense, that people are entering this field, blind people, that you know, the type of training, what tools could be developed, and I'm thinking of all sorts. So, they could be technological tools. They could be others. We don't know. I think this is one of those areas where because we're – people who are trying to get into it are just trying to do the best they can with what is out there right now, that as people start to do it, we'll learn more about what could be useful.

**KIM CHARLSON:** Yeah, I totally agree with that. I think you never can say what the technological tools are going to be because they evolve so quickly and there's going to be new things out there.

**CHRIS SNYDER:** Indeed. How many of us wish we'd bought stock in Zoom before the pandemic?

*[Laughter]*

[FINAL THOUGHTS]

**KIM CHARLSON:** Exactly. All right.

Well, I personally, and on behalf of the Subject Matter Expert Committee for the certification process, want to thank everyone who participated in this today. And

those of you who hopefully have other things and other thoughts, please, again, share, send an email with your thoughts to [comments@AVCREP.org](mailto:comments@AVCREP.org). The more we can hear from, you know, other peoples' viewpoints, helps our committee to develop the most open process.

And our work after the forum, we'll be gleaning through, as I said, the transcript, the recording to clean it up and make it available so others can listen to the great comments, presentations, and sharing that we had today, to learn more about how blind professionals in the field of audio description craft their writing and how they develop their writing. I think it's been very helpful to me. I'm sure it's been helpful to my colleagues on the SME. And please, what I think we really want all of you to take away from this, is there is – there is no pre-set agenda for our certification process. We want it to be transparent. We want it to be equitable. And we want it to be accessible. And that's what we're striving to develop is something that can work for everyone in the field who wants to pursue professional certification to advance their career, to advance the field, and to grow the field.

I can tell you that growing the field is important to me and getting qualified people to come into the field is important to me, whether they're blind or sighted. I want them to be qualified. I want them to be good. Because we're on the cusp of moving, I think, into the next generation of CVAA over the next couple years, where we think we've got a lot of description now, if we're fortunate to move into the next generation of CVAA, we will have even more. And we should have more.

You know, my dream is that audio description will be as ubiquitous to television and film and streaming and online services as captioning is today. And when we reach that point, I can – I can lean back in my easy chair and know that my work is done and that we're really on a great course for the future. And that's my dream and my goal for where we should be taking this field and this profession, and there's a lot – there's going to be a lot of room for a lot more professionals who have the qualifications, the skills, the talent to provide good audio description. And that's what I want to see.

So, again, I want to thank everyone. I want to thank my colleagues who helped. Joel, Deb Cook Lewis, our timer, Celia. Thank you to all of you for your support.

And please continue to stay in touch. And if there's questions out there, please send them to [comments@AVCREP.org](mailto:comments@AVCREP.org).

For me, I want to thank you all again for participating. So, good night and thank you.

**[MEETING CONCLUDED]**