

February 28, 2018

TO: All Interested in Audio (Video) Description
FROM: Kim Charlson
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SUBJECT: Certification for Audio Describers

The Audio Description Field Needs Your Help!

The American Council of the Blind believes strongly in the importance of audio description as a means of access to many aspects of our culture. We also believe that the time has come to ensure that audio description services are of the highest quality.

It is critical for experts in the field to work closely with knowledgeable users of description to establish training opportunities and guidelines/best practices for audio description as it occurs in a broad range of venues. Only through this process, can we be certain of receiving a consistent, high-quality product, developed in a professional environment.

In order to ensure a high level of audio description excellence in a range of formats or venues (media, performing arts, museums, etc.), the American Council of the Blind (ACB) has reached out to the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals (ACVREP) to develop a certification process for audio description professionals.

Certification in audio description is a formal recognition that an individual has demonstrated a proficiency within, and comprehension of, description's best practices. It is a measurement of skills and knowledge which will provide description producers, theaters and government agencies an assurance that an individual can meet the demands of employers and the consumers of audio description.

It should be noted that in the U.K., the Audio Describers Association offers a series of training sessions and tests as well as experiential criteria which comprise a certification process for description for the performing arts and media. There is also a significant body of knowledge, guidelines and best practices around the world, with most information available from the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada.

An important element of the certification development process will be inclusion of experienced description consumers and their potential for certification as description consultants, audio editors, as voice talent and in other capacities.

Other models exist that can guide the certification development process. For instance, the U.S.-based Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) plays a leading role in maintaining a high standard of quality for interpreters. RID certifications are a highly valued asset and provide an independent verification of an interpreter's knowledge and abilities, allowing them to be nationally recognized for the delivery of interpreting services among diverse users of signed and spoken languages.

The Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals (ACVREP), in collaboration with subject matter experts in the field of description, will develop the certification process. ACVREP oversees several well-established international certification programs focused on professionals working with people who are blind or vision impaired, such as:

- Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist (CATIS)
- Certified Low Vision Therapist (CLVT)
- Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist (COMS)
- Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (CVRT)

These programs are designed to offer professionals the means to demonstrate critical knowledge and skills that promote the provision of quality services and ethical practice. (For more information on ACVREP, please visit <https://www.acvrep.org>)

The subject matter expert recruitment process is outlined at <https://www.acvrep.org/about/sme> Also, please see the attached copy of ACVREP's "Process For Establishing A Certification."

So how will the certification procedure be established? How will that "measurement" of experience and awareness of audio description best practices be taken? Would there be different criteria for describers of media vs those working in the performing or visual arts, or even in educational contexts and on websites? Will an examination be required? Will past experience be considered? Should those certified be required to complete a certain course of study/training?

The answers to these questions and many others will be the responsibility of the ACVREP Subject Matter Experts (SME) Board, once it is officially chartered. ACVREP needs our assistance to identify a strong cross section of the Audio Description (AD) community to participate on this board with the goal of having the Audio Description Subject Matter Expert Board constituted by December 15, 2018.

There are several steps to complete over the next 10 months to reach this goal. We must engage the Audio Description Community to obtain an excellent slate of candidates for this board. To this end, we are encouraging all interested parties to participate in this discussion. An email inbox has been created to gather your input and capture contact information for interested parties. Also, we will hold an open conference call/meeting of the Audio Description Project certification sub-committee on Monday, April 2, 2018 at 8:00 pm EST. Join us! Simply call in to 605 605-475-4700 and tap in the access code 571433, followed by the pound sign. In addition, an AD Certification open discussion/panel will be facilitated by Kathleen Zeider, ACVREP Executive Director, at the Audio Description Project Conference in St. Louis, MO, held in conjunction with the annual conference and convention of the American Council of the Blind, July 1-3, 2018. Then, it is hoped that subject matter experts can be convened this fall to begin building the platform to support a certification process.

We invite you to join us in this effort! We welcome your comments and your willingness to participate in the process. We hope to collect your responses to the thought questions below by mid-May for discussion at the July session.

- How should the certification procedure be established?
- How should that "measurement" of experience and awareness of audio description best practices be taken?
- Should there be different criteria for describers of media versus those working in the performing or visual arts, educational contexts and on websites?
- How will past experience be considered?
- Should those certified be required to complete a certain course of study/training?

Over the next 12 months, these questions and others will be discussed as part of formulating the certification process. We are especially interested in hearing from audio description consumers, describers, description producers and government agency representatives.

Please contact us at ADcertification@acb.org with your responses to the questions posed, your opinions on a certification process, and your willingness to help develop such a process. We look forward to hearing from you by May 1, 2018. It will take everyone's engagement to develop a certification process that can work for the audio description field and ensure the professional recognition of description as a valued creative form and essential accessibility process.