

## LOCATION

**The aim is to create awareness around what to look for when looking for a place and/or trail that is suitable for an Accessible Forest Practice experience. What places are suitable and what places might not be and why.**

The Accessible Forest Practice is highly adaptable and the universal walk flow can take place in a variety of settings that include parks, botanical gardens, forests, beaches, deserts, and other natural environments. When working with different populations we have to take into

consideration what their specific needs might be and inquire if they are met by the location we are envisioning. The art lies in finding a place that meets the population specific needs and the facilitator's relationship with the place they will be guiding in.

## IMPORTANT CRITERIA TO REFLECT ON

### Physical Accessibility and Mobility

How mobile is the group that you will be guiding? Are they able to walk by themselves or will they be on wheelchairs? How does that affect the choice of location?

Consider what you need to look for in the trails:

- Flat, stable surfaces like, for example, paved paths or is the population you will be guiding be able to and potentially benefit from a more challenging terrain?
- Is it soft and flat or is it steep and has roots, stones, loose leafs or any other natural elements that might cause participants to trip and fall over?
- Does the location need to have wheelchair and mobility aid-friendly access points?
- What is the proximity to parking, toilets, and resting spots?

### Sensory and Emotional Safety

What is this location like? What is your sensory experience of this place? Think about the population that you will be guiding and how they might experience this location.

What is the soundscape of this place? Can you hear traffic and other man made noises? How might that impact the experience for the participants? Low noise pollution (traffic, machinery).

- Consider what you need to look for in the trails:
- Gentle spaces like forest edges, that have open gathering spaces where participants can see each other and that offers soft light trickling through the canopy.
- Avoid places that exhibit an overwhelming visual and auditory stimuli.

### Cultural and Emotional Considerations

Is the location welcoming for people who may carry trauma, displacement, or cultural disorientation? Are there symbols, signage, or local community patterns that may feel unsafe or unfamiliar?

### Privacy and Containment

Consider looking for locations and spaces that feel enclosed without being confining. Visit these locations on different days of the week and at different times of the day so that you become familiar with them and can avoid spaces that have sudden crowds, exposure, or interruptions

### Wayfinding and Orientation

What is the signage like in this place? Are signs clear and simple?

What is the trail like? Are there loop trails and defined entry and exit points to support reducing anxiety of participants?



## SOME PRACTICAL TIPS:

- **Walk the trail slowly beforehand**— do it several times and observe and feel the trail through multiple lenses: mobility, trauma, sensory needs, cultural differences.
- **Check for benches or natural resting areas** – How prevalent should these be considering the population you will be guiding?
- **Look for shade** and protection from weather conditions such as sunlight and rain.
- **Minimize stairs, steep slopes, loose leafs and roots and mossy stones.**
- **Evaluate parking and drop-off zones**—can a van or aid vehicle easily access it? What about public transport options to the location? Are they available? What are they?
- **Notice cell signal** if emergencies may arise.



## EXPLORE:

- **Map the inclusivity and accessibility of the location:** Create a sensory-access map of your local trails and potential locations — note where tensions might arise for different groups based on the specific population needs.
- **Visit with other community members:** Ask someone that works with the population you will be guiding to walk the trail with you and reflect on comfort and access.
- **Practice “slowing the eye”:** Look at the trail from a child’s height, a seated view, or from a place of emotional fatigue.

## REFLECT:

- Who is this location accessible to and who is excluded by default?
- Am I unconsciously designing this experience for people like me?
- What does accessibility mean beyond ramps—emotionally, socially, culturally?
- How do I balance safety with spaciousness?
- Am I truly offering a sense of belonging for those who may feel out of place in public green spaces?
- What assumptions can I unlearn to better serve the people I guide?

