

The Why and How of Our Facility Tour Video

In 2022 the Aikido IDEA Project awarded a micro-grant to Aikido of Madison. Our grant application asked for funds to help us produce a short orientation video for our website that would help increase access and inclusion for people who might be hesitant to consider participating in Aikido for fear that they might encounter physical, emotional, or cultural barriers. This is a short overview of what went into the video.

Because it was a MICRO-grant, we did as much of the planning and pre-production work as possible, saving our filmmaker's time for camera work and editing. The micro-grant allowed us to hire a filmmaker, but given the wealth of tools available even for smart phones, a project like this is potentially within reach for any person or group of people who are willing to educate themselves on how to use them. If we had a big budget we could have used a professional voice-over actor. Instead, the on-camera talent was some dojo members who were OK being filmed and who were available on a weekday when our filmmaker could fit us in.

But first, why do this?

Certainly we want the benefits of Aikido to be as widely available as possible. The Founder's stated vision included the whole world, so we should, too.

But one thing we've come to learn in recent years is that a term like "the whole world" might actually mean different things to different people. The Founder accepted women and foreigners as students, and that was boundary-breaking at the time. Would he have accepted a person who was openly gay or transgender, or someone with a significant disability? I certainly don't know. And what does it even mean to "accept" someone? At some level it just means you won't turn them away. But if you don't provide an environment where their human needs are seen and respected, you don't need to tell them to go away. They'll get that message loud and clear.

As the person who managed the project, I can say that the whole undertaking—from applying for the grant through identifying areas for immediate improvement and trying to understand the challenges a prospective student might face—has been the most significant growth opportunity I have ever received from Aikido. In the past several years many of us have tried to engage with the concept of privilege and how it shows up in our lives. It was this project that provided a breakthrough in understanding for me. I can't encourage strongly enough that every dojo undertake a process like this, whether you end up producing content to share or not. Yes, it is important to make your dojo ready to take people in, but first you have to prepare to take them into your heart.

The process

Planning the video helped us see a number of changes we wanted to make before we filmed. These included:

- Re-stripping the parking lot with a compliant accessible parking space
- Adding a folding seat (350lbs capacity) and grab bar to our ground-floor bathroom which will double as a changing room for those who don't use stairs
- Moving furniture that would impede people using crutches, walkers, or other mobility assistance

- Some action items cost money, others were free--we just had see the problem.

We had done some work before this project, including:

- Private changing room
- Folding seat in the boot-up area for those with balance challenges (ours is too small for benches or chairs)
- Wheelchair-compliant bathroom, plus a ramp to access the mat.

The private changing room was a pretty big undertaking for us, but it's been a huge benefit. Often kids will use it if they are not super comfortable being in the shared changing room with adults, and it's also nice to be able to offer a private space to a visiting instructor when hosting a seminar. Just try to remember, it's PRIVATE. People will use it for any number of reasons which are not anyone else's business.

Some things are free--you just have to tell people:

- How do people get to the dojo if they don't have a car? Bus/subway/bike path, etc.
- Do you communicate that you respect people's gender identities? This can include signage at the dojo, as well as including pronouns in instructor bios on your dojo website.
- What solutions do you have for people who have mobility challenges, such as difficulty with stairs?
- What will the experience be like for people who are not comfortable in English, or whatever other language is used in your dojo?
- Is there clear explanation of any financial assistance programs you have available?

What went into the making of the video?

- We structured it as a tour, so the "plot" unfolds in the order someone would experience when they visit for the first time. It's not necessary to film the scenes in the same order they will appear if you plan to edit the recorded material.
- We often have visitors or new students, so it's easy for us to remember to tell people what to do with their shoes and where to change. Thinking through the experience of someone who experiences the world differently than we do is an extra challenge. Think of things like "where do I put my shoes if I don't go downstairs where the shoe racks are?" or "What will I do if I am not sure which changing room I should use?"
- Once we knew how we wanted the "tour" to go, we created a script.
- We chose a shooting day when we could get enough people to come during daylight hours and there were no classes in the building. Because we had multiple hosts, people who were not on camera at a given time could be crew--holding cue cards, etc.
- Shooting for our 5 minute video took a little under 3 hours--much longer than expected. Everything took multiple takes, we shot some walk-through/background material (known as "B-roll"), and some things were altered based on light and other factors. And remember, we had a pro behind the camera.
- We knew in advance that we wanted audio descriptions, but we didn't do a great job of leaving time for them in some of the shots. Some of the scenes ended up getting extended a bit in order to leave time for the narration to finish.
- With a pro behind the controls, the editing process was super-quick--we had a first edit within days. If you end up with a lot of editing to do and nobody is familiar with the tools, it might take longer.

- Closed captions and the audio narration for descriptions were both generated automatically. Just like with auto-complete on your phone, check to make sure they're right.

Top tips if you're thinking of doing something like this for your dojo:

- Use the shooting schedule to create accountability and target dates for improvements.
- With respect to accessibility improvements, if it's free, do it right away.
- Try to leave behind your bias about who can and cannot do Aikido. If they don't make it to the mat you'll never find out if they can do it or not.
- The whole process can be DIY if someone is willing to put in the time to learn the tools. Use the money you save to make improvements.
- We chose to do ours with hosts, almost like a TV news story. People are used to all kinds of content, so it could certainly work to do a point-of-view walk through with a smartphone. Just make sure to add all the extras afterwards, like closed captions and audio descriptions.
- Don't let perfect be the enemy of good. It's OK to acknowledge that you have more work to do.
- Tell the truth. It's not a promotional video. The point is to be honest with people who may be taking a significant emotional risk in coming to the dojo. If you over-promise or mis-represent, you can cause real harm.
- If you want to really engage with all the forms of exclusion that a dojo can unintentionally engage in and learn about how to address them, subscribe to the mailing list at the Aikido IDEA Project (<https://www.aikidoideaproject.com/>). You'll be notified when they re-launch their self-study course. You can go through it and learn a ton about how to provide a better environment for people with a wide range of experiences and needs.