**More Partners, More-Accessible Public Places**

The UniDescription Project has carried on, despite this pandemic-plagued period of world history. We worked remotely. We postponed field visits. We incorporated Zoom. We have kept trying to make the world more-accessible for people who are blind or have low-vision. This annual report shares some of these 2020-2021 highlights.

During this past year, we hosted two Descriptathons (D6 and D7), which focused on U.S. National Park Service sites around Washington, D.C., and in the Midwest Region. Our primary partners at Google and the American Council of the Blind were, of course, back to lend critical support. During these Descriptathons we welcomed new collaborators from the Blinded Veterans Association, the Helen Keller National Center for DeafBlind Youths and Adults, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We brought on board our first international partner, Parks Canada. We unveiled major improvements to UniD’s website ([www.unidescription.org](http://www.unidescription.org/)), offering robust and open-access online tools for learning about, making, and sharing Audio Description. We received significant additional grant-support from Google and the National Park Service to improve Audio Description research and practice. And, shortly after earning a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to create a model of artistic audio description at The Goldsworthy Walk in San Francisco, we earned another major federal grant – this one from the National Endowment for the Humanities – to conduct a three-year research project. That NEH project will establish better AD guidelines for describing people, objects, and maps. So, in short, …

The future is bright, and we carry on!

**Highlights from June 2020 to May 2021**

**Honored by AAM:** Dr. Brett Oppegaard, UniD’s Principal Investigator, earned the Gold-Level MUSE Award for Research and Innovation from the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). One AAM judging comment noted that UniD, “has the potential to be a game changer for accessibility of heritage content.”

**A Trio of Major Grants:** UniD was awarded a $296,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, a $50,000 grant from Google, and a $45,000 grant from the National Park Service. The NEH grant is focused on portrait, object, and maps description. Google and NPS grants support Descriptathon-related activities and basic research. All funds will contribute to the ongoing development of UniD’s webtools and support systems.

**Publishing Research:** Dr. Oppegaard, Dr. Megan Conway, and Tuyet Hayes published their findings about map description in “Technical Communication,” the No. 1 academic journal in the field of Technical Communication. Dr. Oppegaard also published audio-description-related research in the flagship AEJMC journal “Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly,” and in a Smithsonian-supported book, “Inclusive Digital Interactive.” In addition, Dr. Oppegaard shared research at several academic conferences, including the Technical Communication Summit Conference & Expo, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and the International Association for Media and Communication Research.

**Website Redesign:** We completed a full redesign of the UniD website ([www.unidescription.org](http://www.unidescription.org/)) which launched just a few days before Descriptathon 6. This major organizational undertaking involved more than 200 hours of new programming.

**Descriptathon 6 (Aug. 18-20, 2020):**

More than 80 participants joined teams from 16 cultural, natural, and heritage sites around North America, mostly around the National Mall in Washington, D.C., but also including for the first time representatives from both Parks Canada and U.S. Fish and Wildlife. A new gamification model for our 16 teams was successfully implemented and tested. This model included members of our Audio Description user community serving on each team with volunteers and site staff.

**Descriptathon 7 (Feb. 9-11, 2021):**

With more than 100 participants, D7 was our biggest Descriptathon yet in terms of people involved (D2 and D5 both included 28 sites). D7 focused on 16 places, mostly NPS sites in the Midwest. The Fish and Wildlife Service, Parks Canada, and several volunteers returned. We also welcomed staff from the Helen Keller National DeafBlind Youth and Adults and members of the Blinded Veterans Association.

**Coming soon, Descriptathon 8 (Oct. 26-28, 2021):** D8 again will include 16 teams, more than 100 participants, and our organizational partners at the NPS, ACB, FWS, PC, BVA, HKNC. D8 also will welcome new collaborators at National Parks UK, the Royal National Institute of Blind People, and The Kennedy Center.