

“Catching lightning in a bottle”: How Blind or Low Vision Creators Navigate Ideation Across Creative Domains

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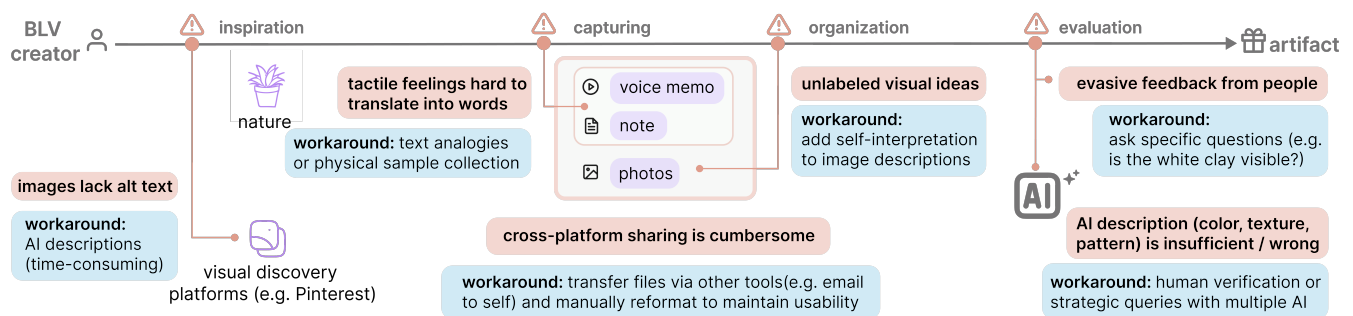


Figure 1: An interaction sequence that highlights different breakdown points a BLV creator may encounter during ideation: finding inspiration, capturing, organizing, and evaluating ideas. We present two inspiration sources: visual discovery platforms (e.g., Pinterest) and nature (e.g., plants). For inspiration, breakdowns arise on visual platforms where images lack alt text. For idea capturing, recording tactile sensations via voice memo or note is hard. In organization, breakdowns include sharing ideas across platforms and unlabeled references. In evaluation, breakdowns include evasive human feedback and insufficient or inaccurate AI-generated descriptions. Although BLV creators develop workarounds, accessibility barriers for one activity can disrupt or even terminate the whole creative ideation trajectory. We highlight that accessible ideation support should address cascading breakdowns along the ideation pathway and center the artistic practices and preferences of BLV creators.

Abstract

Ideation, i.e., generating, capturing, organizing, and evaluating ideas, is foundational to creative practices; yet little is known about how blind and low vision (BLV) creators engage in ideation. We conducted interviews with 20 BLV creators working in different domains including poetry, music production, tactile graphics, digital drawing, and mixed-media arts. Our findings reveal how participants established accessible creative workflows under social and institutional constraints, drew inspiration from diverse physical and digital sources, captured and organized ideas across text, audio, visual, and physical modalities, and evaluated their work through human and AI feedback. We discuss how ableist norms and accessibility breakdowns cascade across ideation pathways, progressively narrowing BLV individuals’ creative possibilities. Finally, we offer

design considerations for building accessible ideation support tools that amplify BLV creators’ distinctive practices.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → **Empirical studies in accessibility**.

Keywords

Creativity support tools, ideation, blind, low vision, accessibility, generative AI

ACM Reference Format:

Mingyi Li, Yutian Shi, Cynthia L. Bennett, and Maitraye Das. 2026. “Catching lightning in a bottle”: How Blind or Low Vision Creators Navigate Ideation Across Creative Domains. In *The 28th International ACM SIGACCESS Conference on Computers and Accessibility (ASSETS ’26)*, October 25–28, 2026, Vila Nova de Gaia, Portugal. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 19 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3797867.3829034>

1 Introduction

Ideation—the process of generating, capturing, organizing, and evaluating ideas—is essential for creators to progress from a problem



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ASSETS ’26, Vila Nova de Gaia, Portugal

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ACM ISBN 979-8-4007-2521-0/2026/10

<https://doi.org/10.1145/3797867.3829034>

state to desired outcomes [61, 63, 80]. Through idea management, individuals can capture fleeting thoughts that may otherwise be forgotten [102, 104]. Creators across various domains rely heavily on tools and materials to manage their ideas, ranging from general-purpose tools (e.g., pen and paper, text messaging) to domain-specific technologies (e.g., Adobe Illustrator, Digital Audio Workstations), for collecting inspiration, curating reference materials, and iterating on ideas [45, 61, 63, 102]. Over the last two decades, HCI researchers have studied and developed numerous creativity and ideation support tools [44, 47]. Yet, much of this work centers on non-disabled users' creative workflows, overlooking the needs of disabled people in ideation processes [29, 39, 77].

Furthermore, widely-adopted creativity frameworks treat visual perception and reasoning as foundational to creative thinking [43, 69]. The prevalence of visual-centric ideation tools, from physical sticky notes [9, 46] to digital moodboards [3, 39, 77], and established strategies like sketching and concept mapping [111], pose significant barriers for blind or low vision (BLV) creators, narrowing ideation options for them and constraining their creative outputs. Yet, BLV individuals have a long history of participating and succeeding in artistic endeavors [11, 42, 52, 114], through which they express their creative potential, cultivate pride in disability identity, and sustain their livelihood.

Recently, accessibility researchers have investigated BLV individuals' creative practices, including image and video creation [24, 57, 58, 125], audio production [82, 89, 106], fiber arts [16, 37, 50], tactile graphics [30, 87], and fabrication [21, 113, 126]. While these studies have advanced our knowledge of accessible creativity by supporting BLV individuals in understanding, exploring, and authoring content, we know little about how they engage in ideation (i.e., the very *first* step of the creative process [49, 61, 63]) and the barriers and opportunities to enhance accessibility in ideation. To address this gap, we report findings from interviews with 20 BLV creators in diverse domains, including poetry, music production, tactile graphics, digital drawing, and mixed-media arts. Our findings reveal how BLV participants established ideation workflows under social and institutional constraints, drew inspiration from various physical and digital sources, captured and organized ideas across text, audio, visual, and physical modalities, and evaluated their work through human and AI feedback.

We make three contributions to HCI, accessibility, and creativity fields. First, we offer a rich characterization of ideation processes of BLV creators, including the accessibility barriers and workarounds they developed to manage ideas, complementing prior research that investigated how BLV creators construct specific artifacts (i.e., the process that usually comes *after* ideation) [21, 34, 50, 57, 90, 107, 113, 124]. Second, we demonstrate the amplified and downstream impacts of inaccessibility experienced through ideation and initial creative exposures. By situating digital accessibility in broader sociotechnical systems, we show how accessibility research may resist ableism beyond immediate technical solutions. Third, we outline practical design considerations for enhancing accessible ideation, building on evolving generative AI capabilities to envision diverse and multi-modal supports usable by BLV creators across various domains.

2 Related Work

2.1 Ideation and Creativity Support in HCI

Ideation (or idea management) is an ongoing process of capturing, organizing, retrieving, developing, and sharing ideas [23, 48, 61, 100, 104]. However, these ideation activities are not discrete or fixed. Following Rosselli Del Turco et al. [104], we conceptualize “ideas” not as stable entities, but as moving targets that function as building blocks to advance the creative work. Recognizing the non-linear, iterative nature of ideation [15, 122], we use these definitions as an analytical lens to probe BLV creators' specific strategies, tool usage, and breakdowns in their ideation workflows. HCI scholars have studied and developed numerous creativity support tools to help people explore, expand, and collaborate on ideas; see [29, 44, 47] for an overview. Researchers also studied how creative practitioners manage ideas across domains, including graphic and interaction designers [33, 45, 103, 117], musicians [102], and researchers [63]. In addition to theorizing ideation and creativity support, researchers designed new technologies to enhance ideation, e.g., providing visual metaphors and stimuli for collaborative ideation [69, 70], using AI to explore alternative design subjects, layouts, or colors [28, 91], and embedding computational feedback for rapid prototyping and iteration [41, 94]. However, much of this work centers around sighted practitioners [29], ignoring how BLV individuals engage in the ideation process.

2.2 Accessibility of Creative Practices

A growing body of HCI and accessibility literature investigates creative practices among disabled makers [11, 17, 31, 59]. Notably, Brody et al. [20] proposed an expansive definition of creativity support tools that challenges normative assumptions—for example, by considering disabled artists' access needs, physical locations, and creative spaces. Bennett et al. [14] found that some disabled artists use generative AI to draw inspiration for ideas while negotiating boundaries around ethics, creative agency, and authorship.

Researchers have specifically studied and developed novel technologies to augment creative practices of BLV individuals across various domains, including image [12, 24, 54, 57, 125] or video creation [58], digital whiteboarding [77], audio production [81, 82, 89, 90, 106, 107], fiber arts [16, 34, 37, 50], tactile graphics [30, 87], and 3D modeling and fabrication [21, 113, 126]. Across these mediums, BLV individuals encountered both technical and social challenges, including lack of support for editing content individually and with others [36, 39, 124] and social bias regarding their inability to author high-quality artifacts [14, 114, 124]. Collectively, this body of work supports BLV individuals in accomplishing domain-specific authoring tasks. We complement this work by examining BLV creators' engagement in the ideation process (e.g., deciding on a pattern to knit) that *precedes* the actual construction work (e.g., knitting a sweater), but directly impacts what ideas get turned into artifacts and how. While some recent work investigated BLV professionals' ideation practices, they examined how BLV creators generate ideas using a particular tool (e.g., digital whiteboard [77] or GenAI [14, 97]), or for specific types of creative work (e.g., weaving [34, 37]). In contrast, by analyzing BLV creators' broader ideation processes that involve an ecosystem of tools and practices, we discuss tool-level accessibility barriers within each ideation phase and their

cascading effects on BLV creators' creative possibilities, and how social constraints and ableist norms shape their ideation pathways.

2.3 Art Exploration Among BLV Individuals

Exposure to existing artwork or relevant examples helps spark novel ideas [71, 111]. Researchers have investigated how BLV individuals currently explore arts, such as visual and tactile media, in museum exhibits, galleries, and everyday environments [7, 8, 22, 65]. However, BLV individuals frequently encounter various challenges due to policies that restrict touching, limited guided tours, and navigation difficulties [7, 8, 22]. To make art exploration more accessible, researchers have developed various technologies, such as tactile overlays, 3D models, touchable artwork, and tactile graphics of artworks [27, 32, 40, 51, 55, 98, 115]. While physical models offer more tactile engagement, as replicas they only approximate form, and they are constrained by cost, quality, and availability [51, 115]. Other common approaches for accessible art exploration include pre-recorded audio walkthroughs of public exhibits [75, 84], touch-based progressive descriptions of digital images [2, 72, 85], and visual question-answering with generative AI tools [26, 65]. We build on this work to discuss how art exploration impacts BLV creators' ideation workflows.

3 Methodology

3.1 Participants and Procedures

With approval from Northeastern University's Institutional Review Board, we distributed an online screener through a BLV-centric organization's mailing list and personal networks. We recruited 20 BLV artists (14 female, 5 male, 1 agender; aged 25–64) aiming for variation in creative domains. This approach helped us understand how sociotechnical constraints and ideation tool choices recur and vary across creative contexts. However, we acknowledge that this might have limited domain-specific details of processes, materials, and sensory practices. Table 1 presents participants' information, self-reported disabilities, and creative practices.

The first author conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews over Zoom. Before each session, we requested participants to bring creative artifacts illustrative of their ideation processes. We first discussed the artifacts, focusing on the ideation workflow preceding the artifacts' construction. Then for each ideation stage (gaining inspiration, capturing, organizing, and evaluating ideas), we asked participants to share their strategies, challenges, tools used, and ideal workflows, probing for domain-specific techniques. Participants demonstrated their artifacts via screen share, panning their camera as they narrated, and/or emailed images.

Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes, and each participant was compensated \$45 USD. Participants could choose to stay anonymous or opt-in to use their real names (first/full name) in the paper. We asked for their preference at the end of each study session and also later sent follow-up emails containing their quotes and a manuscript draft to confirm their choices. Following prior studies [14, 20, 83], we chose this approach to credit participants for their contributions, as many artists rely on self-promotion.

3.2 Data Analysis

Following the reflexive thematic analysis method [19], we open-coded all interview transcripts using inductive and deductive coding. Our deductive codes were informed by prior work on ideation among creative practitioners [44, 47, 61, 104], e.g., eureka moments of creative sparks, sketching for brainstorming, and brain dumping. Our inductive codes highlighted BLV creators' unique ideation strategies, e.g., tactile exploration of inspirational sources, organizing reference materials in physical containers, and labeling photos with contextual information. We produced analytic memos to reflect on participants' ideation practices across visual, auditory, tactile, and text-based modalities [64, 67]. Co-authors met weekly to review data, codes, and memos, and iteratively developed four themes that detailed how participants maintained creative agency and engaged in different ideation activities.

Our team includes researchers with diverse visual abilities, with expertise in accessibility, creativity, and responsible AI research. Our epistemological background rooted in feminist disability studies scholarship [68, 78, 120] informed our data collection and analytical process, especially in interpreting ableist norms in BLV creators' ideation practices.

4 Findings

Our findings trace how BLV creators developed distinctive strategies for sourcing, recording, and refining creative ideas, while simultaneously navigating accessibility barriers, social constraints, and tool limitations that shaped which ideas were reachable, preservable, and ultimately realizable.

4.1 Maintaining Creative Agency Under Constraints

Participants detailed the challenges they encountered even before entering certain creative domains and how they selected tools, techniques, and spaces for building viable workflows. While their practices might appear accessible on the surface, underlying sociotechnical constraints painted more complex creative journeys. Importantly, these upstream decisions set the boundaries within which BLV creators performed all subsequent idea management activities (Sections 4.2–4.4). Moreover, prioritizing accessibility means that participants often forwent existing platforms, materials, or spaces, whereas sighted creators can choose from various options based on their interests.

Growing up blind or low-vision, several participants were not expected to engage in certain creative practices, especially visual-dominant arts. Inaccessible educational resources further prevented them from developing creative expertise. As Adrian reflected: *“When I was a kid, traditional painting and drawing classes were really inaccessible to me... People write off your creative abilities at a young age... ‘Maybe he can be a lawyer or just focus on words, but don’t do anything graphical.’”* Some participants internalized doubts about their creative potential, particularly when working in visual mediums where they could not fully perceive or verify the outcomes. Jessica described a lasting insecurity about sharing visual artwork with others: *“I can’t draw anything very realistic... I’m not even really sure what other people think when they see my drawings... I’m afraid sometimes they’ll think it’s really ugly.”* Jessica’s account illustrates

Table 1: Self-reported visual disabilities, creative practices, and other information of interview participants. Tables 2 and 3 in the Appendix report participants' use of assistive technologies and ideation tools. The asterisks (*) denote pseudonyms.

Participant	Visual Disability	Creative Practice	Personal Website/Link
Marco Salsiccia	Totally blind	Tactile graphics, digital logo (SVG coding)	https://marconius.com/svg
Precious Perez	Blind	Songwriting, music production, video and photo creation	https://preciousperezmusica.com
Sophie Trist	Totally blind	Fiction, poetry, nonfiction, playwriting	
Leslie Dickson	Totally blind	Woodworking, metal embossing, leatherwork, crochet, loom knitting, photography	
Mia*	Cortical vision impairment	Woodworking, quilting, weaving, oil painting	
Nora*	Congenitally blind	Collage, pottery, sculpture, tactile drawing, museum exhibits design	
Joseph King	Totally blind	Digital audio production	https://josephking.bandcamp.com
Emma*	Low vision	Illustrations (visual)	
Olivia*	Blind	Tactile models, tactile graphics, loom knitting, making bracelets and candles	
Lindsay Hughes	Legally blind	Jewelry making, beadwork, photography	https://perpetuallycharmed.etsy.com
Adrian Rodriguez	Low vision	Graphic and UI design (Figma), 3D design (Blender), slides design (Keynote)	https://dreamlinks.com
Jennifer Gass	Blind	Poetry, logo and layout design	
Jennifer Williams	Legally blind	Crochet, knitting, video tutorials	youtube.com/@Froggywentaknitting facebook.com/groups/froggywentaknitting
Ahmet Ustunel	Totally blind	Ceramics, pottery, sculptures	https://blindartgallery.com
Ann Chiappetta	Blind	Mixed-media art, wall art (acrylics, upcycled materials, collage paper), writing	https://annchiappetta.com
Razz	Legally blind	Digital drawing (Procreate on iPad), photography, fiction writing	https://razzekart.tumblr.com
Angela Wolf	Totally blind	Fiber art, clay, paper-cutting, painting, drawing	
Jessica Tomlinson	Legally blind	Digital audio production, keyboard performance, visual art	https://linktr.ee/the_vi_artist
Adam Rushforth	Totally blind	Card game, music writing, storybook for kids	https://dontbreakthebudget.com
Barbara	Totally blind	Poetry	

how sustained social messaging around visual ability and creative worth shaped BLV creators' self-perception and led some to preemptively withdraw from pursuing visual art. Furthermore, most art training was centered around cultivating *visual* analytical skills. Angela recalled her studio art experience from college where she was questioned for having sighted assistance to describe course materials: *"I had a professor tell me once, 'I don't want you to have a describer because you're not taking in the image and producing it yourself'... I tried to explain, the description is how I encounter the world as a blind person."* She eventually pursued a different degree since the original department was *"very focused on the vision piece."* Angela recounted the practical impossibility of certain course requirements: *"how are you going to do a life drawing class as a blind person without touching the model?"* The assumption that art requires direct visual intake positions being sighted as a prerequisite for artistic ownership. This ableist perception of creativity considers disability accommodations (e.g., having a describer) as threats to authentic art-making and self-expression, ignoring the need for non-visual approaches to cultivating art skills.

The societal tendency to redirect BLV individuals' interests or professions to other domains not only prevented them from engaging with arts but also reduced opportunities for sighted artists to continue practicing visual arts if they experienced vision loss later in life. Ann elaborated: *"I was mourning my vision loss. I didn't have any room to figure out how to make the visual arts special to me*

anymore. So I started writing... but I still love art and color, that never changed. So after I retired, I decided to get back into mixed-media art... with acrylics, canvas, paper, recycled or upcycled things like foam." Ann's trajectory—from mourning and withdrawal, through text-based creative outlets, and eventually back to mixed-media arts—was echoed across participants who navigated similar obstacles.

Rather than abandoning creative work altogether, BLV participants often migrated toward mediums that offered richer non-visual feedback (e.g., texture, spatial layout, auditory cues) to maintain creative agency. Notably, participants who continued with visual art did so through fundamentally different methods. Ann noted, *"I didn't think I'd be able to do stencil work being blind. But I learned how to be very careful and how to use my fingers... and my hands to help guide my brush... I have different brush techniques that a sighted person might not use."* Marco, who had a programming background, designed digital logos by writing SVG (Scalable Vector Graphics) code, bypassing inaccessible visual illustration software (Adobe Illustrator). While this approach gave him more control over the output, it demanded substantial cognitive labor (*"mapping in my head"*) to translate two-dimensional shapes and paths into precise numerical coordinates and hold those mappings in working memory). Characterizing the process of figuring out ways to produce *"freeform drawing"* by SVG coding as *"very frustrating,"* Marco noted: *"If Inkscape and Illustrator were accessible in the first place, that would remove the need to hand code all of this."*



Figure 2: Examples of participants' artwork inspired by disability, cultural associations, and relationships with others: (a) Jessica's digital cover art for Christmas classical music played on a digital music synthesizer. It shows a "cartoony synthesizer with a flower rose window... and a panel with weird patch cables, some sliders and knobs." (b) Razz's 'Sunr-eye-s' digital drawing, and (c) Marco's braille rainbow graphic where "each bow of the rainbow is made up of braille, spelling out the color of that specific bow... The spacing of the braille, when presented in a tactile format, goes from a text experience where you're reading the braille and then turns into a field of texture dots that coalesces together and lands inside an open book." (d) Emma's illustration that recreates scenery from her friend (a dog owner)'s house, and (e) Leslie's tattoo idea, starting from the reference image of a stuffed octopus, her Wikki Stix recreation, and a final tattoo created by another artist based on those ideas.

Some participants gravitated toward creative styles that were forgiving of imprecision since exact visual measurement or alignment was difficult. Mia explained why she preferred carving over furniture-making: "I don't do things that have to be square or truly level, because it's just never gonna happen." For Mia, embracing forms that tolerated imperfections was a deliberate choice that shaped her artistic identity [118]. Many others moved from physical to digital mediums which offered affordances (magnification, reversibility, and high-contrast rendering) essential for making the work feasible. Jessica, who could not see regular pencil lines due to low contrast and had to use inerasable dark ink pens, transitioned to digital drawing apps (Procreate on iPad). Thus, the creative pathways of BLV participants were not simply narrower versions of sighted workflows but distinct practices built from the ground up.

These findings illustrate how BLV creators must invest substantial effort in developing, testing, and refining accessible workflows that sighted creators do not consider. Participants were often forced to forgo many options, including preferred tools, practices, and domains, which narrowed their creative possibilities even before they could develop and exercise their own art languages and agency.

4.2 Drawing Inspiration for New Ideas

Participants drew on diverse inspirational sources, many paralleling those of sighted creators [23, 49, 61, 104]. Nevertheless, our analysis revealed how disability identity and accessibility shaped the availability, form, and effort required to access these sources, sometimes constraining what inspiration was reachable, and other times leading to unique approaches that expanded creative possibilities.

4.2.1 Disability Identity, Culture, and Interpersonal Relationships. A defining source of inspiration for many participants was their disability identity and lived experience [17]. For example, Sophie's writing challenged the dominance of sighted narrators' perspectives in fiction by centering blind protagonists. Similarly, as a "blind musician of color," Precious composed Latin Pop in Spanish to connect different facets of her intersectional identity and be "really proud and loud about it." This centering of disability as creative fuel framed participants' disability as a form of expertise that produced distinctive artistic knowledge. Inspiration also emerged from "crossover" (Ann) between multiple art forms and cultural roots. Jessica, who created digital cover art for a Christmas release of classical music pieces she played (Figure 2a), described how one medium (digital synthesizer for music production) directly seeded ideas for another (visual art), combined with cultural associations (stained glass window in churches).

Others drew on their disability experience for aesthetic decision-making and self-expression. Barbara, who had synesthesia [10], translated her cross-sensory perception of color into a series of 78 poems and wrote a "color wheel poem" for her blind friends who found it hard to understand color-related trivia questions, turning a shared accessibility challenge into a creative gift. Razz expressed their passion for the eyeball theme, rooted in childhood memories of having to explain their eye condition to others. They reclaimed their disability as a meaningful aesthetic symbol in digital drawings (Figure 2b) and by naming the piece 'Sunrise' as 'Sunr-eye-s.' Some participants further channeled disability experience into novel art forms that reimaged the conventions. Marco created digital and tactile graphics that broke braille formatting standards by arranging

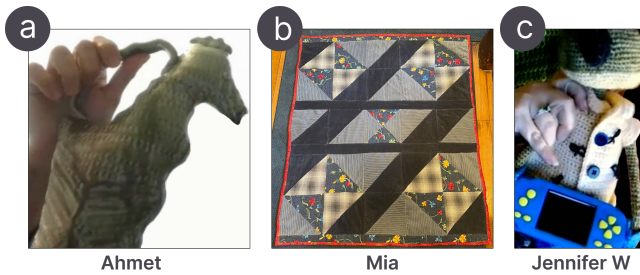


Figure 3: Examples of participants' artwork that are inspired by nature objects and material supplies: (a) Ahmet's seahorse-shaped pot, (b) Mia's quilt with embroidered and floral patterns, and (c) Jennifer W's crocheted "gamer frog."

braille letters along curved, rainbow-shaped arcs rather than the conventional left-to-right, straight lines (Figure 2c). He explained, "With this, we can make braille flow just as freely as any other text that you would see in an advertisement or motion graphic... You no longer have to abide by the rules that have been set in every braille book." Marco's work illustrates how disability-specific materials (e.g., braille, white cane) can become a site of creative experimentation. By treating braille as a visual and tactile element with expressive potential, he expanded what the medium could do and produced work that was legible as both text and texture.

Creative ideas also emerged through close relationships and creative communities. Emma made an illustration book where she recreated a friend's home interiors with their dogs in each scene (Figure 2d): "I'm just capturing little pieces of their life and putting it... in miniature." Online creative communities could also stimulate ideas, such as by regularly offering structured prompts. Jessica noted a music forum as a "caring, off the beaten track" space that offered weekly prompts (e.g., record a piece with only instrumental or non-verbal sounds) "to stretch our skills and limit ourselves and see what we can do with it." Some participants directly collaborated with other artists to ideate and create new artifacts. For designing a tattoo inspired by a stuffed octopus (Figure 2e), Leslie first sketched her idea with WikkiStix, took the sketch and a reference photo to a graphic artist who refined them into a digital format, and lastly brought it to a tattoo artist. Here, Leslie's tattoo design moved through a chain of creative collaborators, each translating the idea into a higher-fidelity medium while preserving her original insights.

4.2.2 Embodied Engagement with Materials and Artworks. BLV creators often felt creative sparks through direct engagement with their surroundings by touching, holding, and exploring tangible objects [34, 101]. Ahmet described how nature provided "forms and textures" for his ceramics (Figure 3a): "I made a bunch of seahorse pots... I grew up close to the sea... When I go to the beach, I find different stones or driftwood. I just feel them and try to include them in my creations." Ann explored supplies (e.g., papers, wood) in stores by touch and selected those that "speak to me and tell me what it wants me to do." Her practice of "meditating on" supplies before beginning an artwork enacted a reflective conversation with materials [108] where tactile qualities initiated the creative process. Although some participants "put equal emphasis on nonvisual and visual aspects

of their artwork" (Nora), others like Mia described a tactile-first approach. She selected a fabric for quilting (Figure 3b) because of its "three-dimensional embroidery," adding that the fabric's visual floral pattern "didn't matter to me at all." Thus, many participants evaluated, selected, and responded to materials through embodied interaction where texture, temperature, weight, and shape served as the primary criteria for decision-making.

The value of direct engagement with inspirational sources became evident (and its absence keenly felt) while visiting public exhibits. Angela recalled visiting a museum where a 3D model of the 'Sunflowers' painting allowed her to perceive Van Gogh's "very specific brushstroke style that is hard to describe. But if you can touch it, it makes more sense." Nevertheless, most exhibits placed artworks out of reach for protection. Although participants could get pre-generated audio descriptions, live narrations from docents or sighted companions, or conduct question-answering with AI (e.g., Be My AI), they noted the incompleteness and inconsistency of these descriptions [22, 35, 75], since different sources offered different interpretations of the same artwork or had varying proficiency at providing descriptions.

4.2.3 Digital Content and AI Tools. Participants adopted a wide variety of digital tools to consume content that seeded new ideas, including online search, social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram), media platforms (e.g., YouTube), visual discovery platforms (e.g., Pinterest), online shops (e.g., Etsy), documentaries, and TV shows. However, participants encountered significant accessibility challenges that constrained what inspiration they could actually reach. For instance, Olivia and Lindsay explained that numbered and text-based knitting and beading patterns made it "easier to keep track of" their current position and avoid "jumping to a different line." However, most patterns sourced online were neither numbered nor contained appropriate text descriptions. Although Lindsay found a workaround by overlaying a numbered grid on top of unnumbered patterns, the overarching challenge persisted for others.

Image-based discovery platforms posed an even greater barrier. Leslie lamented the inability to use Pinterest: "Being able to look at pictures and pin them to my own boards and get thoughts from that, I used to do that a lot when I had some vision... I wish there was a better way to do Pinterest nonvisually." While sighted users could "scroll through hundreds of images" in seconds by visually scanning and dismissing irrelevant results, Leslie had to process each image through a "time-consuming" AI description pipeline that involved downloading images and then running them individually through AI tools. Describing this challenge as "slow vision," she explained: "you're looking at 20–30 seconds for every image description." Thus, inaccessible discovery platforms fundamentally altered the speed and scale of creative browsing.

Additionally, participants used AI as a brainstorming partner for various tasks: generating video titles (Jennifer W), finding word synonyms for lyrics (Precious, Adam), puns to include in beaded bracelets (Lindsay), names for the setup in a dystopian novel (Sophie), taglines for art portfolios (Ann), knitting pattern ideas (Olivia), UX design concepts (Adrian), and tattoo ideas (Precious). Ann recounted a back-and-forth generative session with Perplexity to design a logo for her art studio (Figure 4c). Across four iterations, she iterated on elements that did not match her original ideas (e.g.,

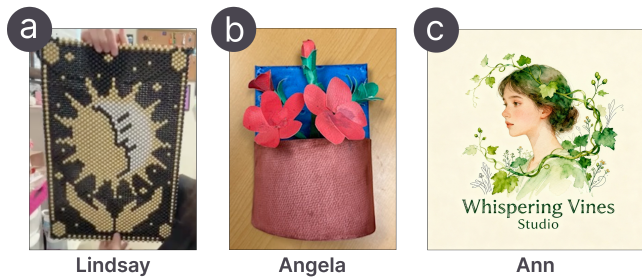


Figure 4: Examples of participants' work that are inspired by digital content or created with AI tools: (a) Lindsay's wall decor made with gold and silver beads, which was transformed from a cuff beading pattern sourced online, (b) Angela's pink flowers paper cut created with the help of AI's drawing instructions, and (c) Ann's logo for an art studio created with AI.

an older woman with gray hair; a “*too scripty*” font for low-vision readers) while retaining other designs she had not explicitly requested, like a vine motif that aligned with the studio name. Thus, while brainstorming with AI, participants retained creative agency by selectively accepting, rejecting, and modifying AI's suggestions.

Participants also used AI to explore visually unfamiliar concepts (e.g., sea anemone) and receive “*step-by-step directions*” (Olivia) for recreating them. However, AI's suggestions were not always well-calibrated to their skill levels or artistic styles. Angela recalled that when asking for instructions to create a plant by paper-cutting (Figure 4b), AI often defaulted to oversimplified responses: “*because it thinks you're doing it as a craft project with kids.*” She worked around this by reframing her prompts (asking instructions for drawing) and adapting the results to suit her paper-cutting practice. She explained her rationale behind this reframing: “*Even though I'm cutting [papers], my brain is doing it as drawing... with scissors... As if I were going to draw those leaves on paper, I can cut them along the lines.*” Thus, accessibility breakdowns in digital resources and AI limitations made BLV creators' ideation efforts inefficient and frustrating. The inaccessibility of visual platforms like Pinterest foreclosed an entire mode of rapid creative browsing, while AI's misalignment with participants' creative intentions and skills required substantial prompting effort to elicit useful content as references.

4.3 Capturing, Organizing, and Revisiting ideas

Once inspiration strikes, creators must capture, organize, and later retrieve their ideas so that promising thoughts are not lost and can be developed at the right time [61]. BLV creators managed this process through multimodal documentation strategies and organizational systems that reflected their creative practices and access needs.

4.3.1 Documenting Content and Context. Idea capture was fraught for some participants, who described sensory mismatches between documentation and imagination so pronounced that they intentionally did not keep track of them. Nora explained: “*The way I imagine it in my hands, how I want it to feel, I have it in my mind. And writing doesn't make it more concrete. If I put it into words, I feel like it's going*

further away from my imagination.” Thus, documentation countered ideation, narrowing rather than opening possibilities for Nora. Most other participants worked across modalities, although inconvenient to their access needs and creative mediums, to preserve eureka moments. Thus, capturing ideas required preserving enough content and context to make a developing thought usable when participants returned to it later. For example, Precious recorded song ideas with her original inspiration source: “*It was inspired by this person. And we were talking about this. So I should make a song called this. I'll literally write all of that down so that I remember exactly why the idea was important.*” Ann wrote narratives about what she wanted a piece to convey; for instance, combining imagery of a firearm, the Constitution, and a heart shape to express both patriotism and grief over gun violence to document an emotional and conceptual direction she was still developing. When some participants took reference photos, they included self-interpretations and reflections in the image label (using the Markup feature on iPhone [6]), since AI-generated descriptions of the same photo would only record surface-level information rather than the specific design elements that interested them. Leslie explained: “*Because I want to remember the specifics of... what I originally liked about the product... Maybe it wasn't the box so much that I'm interested. Maybe it was the hinges. Maybe it was the latch... I want to get those details that I want to focus on.*” However, Mia noted that labeling photos was “*not a quick, easy, intuitive thing,*” which ultimately led many participants to leave seas of photos unlabeled and later had difficulty retrieving and recalling their purpose or relevance.

For participants working with physical materials, capturing ideas often meant recording sensory impressions, including how something felt, what materials might replicate that feeling, or how it connected to their creative goals. While some participants found verbalizing tactile experiences inadequate to capture the original sensation, others developed helpful strategies to remember sensory qualities. Olivia detailed how she documented tactile feelings engendered by items she encountered at craft fairs: “*Taking a picture isn't very helpful for me... Sometimes I'll just text myself, I saw this hat that had a swirly texture to it... It feels like a waffle knit... I'll say if the hat has a brim. If it's a scarf, whether it was an infinity scarf or had tassels.*” Olivia used analogies to familiar textures (waffle knit, swirly) and structural descriptors (brim, tassels) to reconstruct sensory experiences in a text format that could later help her find a similar pattern. When tactile inspiration was readily available in physical form, some participants bypassed verbal documentation entirely and directly collected samples. For example, Ahmet carried a tote bag on walks to gather materials like “*pine cones, avocado seeds, pistachio shells, banana peels, eucalyptus, sesame seeds*” that could later add “*different textures and colors*” to his pottery.

Others documented potential use cases and construction plans. Mia recorded quilting fabric quantities, row counts, and measurements: “*basically freeing up mental space so I can still think about the creative piece, as opposed to the logistics.*” Across these diverse documentation modes, participants' choice of *what* to capture was closely tied to *how* they captured it, as different types of creative content demanded different tools and modalities.

4.3.2 Choosing Tools and Modalities for Idea Capture. Participants adopted various tools to capture ideas across modalities (textual,

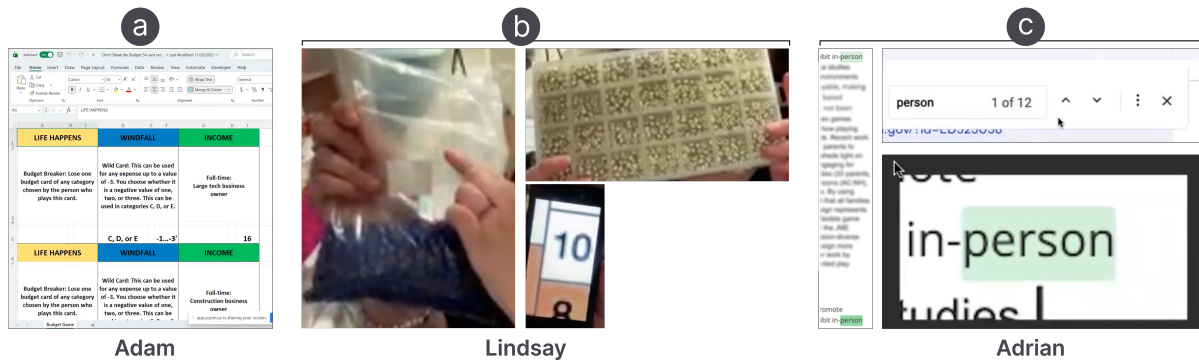


Figure 5: Examples of how participants captured ideas, organized materials, and searched/revisited prior ideas: (a) Adam used a spreadsheet to track cards designed for a budget game; (b) Lindsay used braille-labeled plastic bags to sort beads by color and containers with separators to organize letter-marked beads. She also collected numbered beading patterns for referencing; and (c) Adrian encountered challenges with the search feature on document editors (Google Docs), which highlight keywords for visual skimming. However, he lost context of the highlighted keywords when using screen magnification.

auditory, visual, tactile), depending on the type of content being captured, creative medium, social settings, and the level of friction each tool introduced into the creative flow.

Text-based tools were the most common capture format due to their relative screen reader accessibility and availability on both phones and computers. Lindsay appreciated iPhone’s built-in Notes app as her “best friend,” since it preserved her dark mode and large text settings, unlike third-party apps. Messaging or emailing to self also served as lightweight methods to capture fleeting thoughts. Olivia liked that messages could function as reminders: “*It’ll come up as an unread text, so I’ll know to go back to it later.*” For more structured record-keeping, participants used document editors (Microsoft Word, Google Docs, Pages) and spreadsheets. Adam, who designed a card game, used Excel to “keep track of” card types and quantities. He leveraged the spreadsheet’s grid structure to arrange cards in left-right-up-down order (Figure 5a) that linear documents could not support. Moreover, Jennifer G and Adam commented that phone apps for text composition were more portable but harder to format, while computer-based editors offered richer editing but less spontaneity.

Audio or voice capture was essential for certain types of ideas, especially when the content was “*bigger than a text can handle*” (Emma) or inherently auditory. Precious used Voice Memos to record song fragments, while Adam carried Victor Stream, a “*blind-friendly*” audio recording device, throughout the day to capture melodies and brainstorm. However, participants in certain creative domains encountered technical barriers with voice capturing tools. As Jennifer W explained, “*Speak-to-Text does not understand crochet or knitting terminology... I want it to abbreviate certain things, otherwise my pattern is going to be 20 pages long instead of 3.*” This technical failure forced her into a laborious pattern-creation workaround; she wrote shorthand patterns in a notebook and read them aloud to a sighted friend, who typed them into a Word document for Jennifer W’s review with magnifiers. Social settings also influenced whether participants captured ideas with speech. Some did whatever was necessary to record ideas, like Precious who once recorded a sudden tune in an airport bathroom, because “*it’s like catching lightning*

in a bottle... Every time you think you’re going to remember it in the morning, you never do.” In contrast, several participants avoided voice capturing in public spaces due to background noise, privacy concerns, and “*feeling self-conscious about speaking aloud to my phone*” (Olivia). Voice capture, despite being highly accessible, was not always socially acceptable [110], which pushed participants back toward texting or delaying idea capture.

Participants also used *photography* to capture reference materials, albeit sparingly, due to its well-documented accessibility challenges [12, 54]. Instead, *physical materials and tools* afforded a fundamentally different idea-capturing mechanism. Marco, whose final artifacts were tactile graphics printed from digitally coded SVG files, documented his initial ideas with raised-line sketching on sensational blackboards [88]. Tactile and mixed-media artists like Mia, Olivia, Lindsay, and Ahmet maintained a physical filing system with drawers and containers of textured papers, stickers, beads, yarns, and art supplies, each organized by material type with braille labels (Figure 5b).

As ideas evolved, participants frequently transferred them across tools, which often required a convoluted and time-consuming workflow driven by platform mismatches. For instance, Jennifer G’s collaborators preferred Google Docs for creating flyers and logos. Although formatting and navigating content using the Docs iPhone app was difficult for her, she was confined to it since her reference photos were in iPhone storage. Moreover, she found it “*harder to track and put things [from phone] to my computer.*” Her workaround was to compose in Docs on the phone, email it to herself, and then reopen it on her computer to edit in her preferred tool, Microsoft Word. Similarly, Angela faced friction when transferring her brainstormed content from ChatGPT into Notes. She explained that the formatting got “*messy*,” as ChatGPT’s copying feature grabbed unnecessary conversational texts like “*ask me for more ideas*” with an art emoji. Thus, cross-tool transfers were a necessary part of participants’ ideation workflow, but each transfer introduced friction, reformatting effort, and the risk of losing context along the way.

4.3.3 Organizing Ideas for Easy Retrieval. Participants developed varied strategies for organizing ideas, ranging from elaborate folder hierarchies to minimal systems that relied on memory and search. The most prevalent strategy was *categorical grouping*, where participants maintained elaborate filing systems with parallel folder structures arranged by project theme, type, functionality, or intended audience. For instance, Ahmet organized content across both physical and digital domains. He sorted inspirational materials curated from nature (seeds, shells) by shape into physical containers, and grouped photos of finished artifacts into digital folders by type (masks, teapots) as references for future ideation.

While organizing ideas, *naming and labeling strategies* were critical to enable easy and viable retrieval paths. Joseph consistently used a date-first format, followed by a descriptive title and status markers like “*rough draft*,” so that files could be sorted chronologically or searched by name. Angela placed identifying keywords in the first few words of each entry on Notes so she could skim quickly while scrolling. Likewise, Jennifer G pinned frequently used items like alt text of favorite photos and project logos to the top of her Notes app for rapid access. Participants also ordered ideas by progress or priority. For instance, Mia used binary marking (0/1) in a spreadsheet to differentiate active, high-priority ideas (“1”) from less urgent ones (“0”).

Participants working with physical materials maintained *spatial and embodied arrangements* depending on frequency of use and spatial separation of visually similar materials (e.g., red vs orange pencil). During beading sessions, Lindsay arranged colored beads needed for the current project around her body in consistent positions so she could grab different beads, relying on “*muscle memory*” rather than sight: “*I’ll put one [bead bag] against my left hip and just mentally know which color (dark blue) I put there... I put the red on my left knee... I never had to look at [bead bags] as I’m beading, I can feel it.*” This organizational structure anchored in spatial landmarks and embodied referencing allows participants to focus on creative aspects instead of circumventing frictions of locating and retrieving materials through visual scanning.

Despite these strategies, many participants found organizing ideas frustrating. Some challenges arose from sheer volume of inspirational sources and the lack of time and effort to keep them organized. Emma described managing ideas across physical and digital contexts as a “*nightmare*.” Her sketchbooks mixed creative ideas with insurance information and passwords, inspirations captured through texts were buried among unrelated messages, and rolls of paper on walls were physically hard to track. Precious echoed this sentiment, as her ideas were “*all scattered*” across over 4000 voice memos, pictures, and videos, all unlabeled. The absence of a centralized system for managing and labeling ideas across modalities and platforms significantly increased participants’ cognitive load.

Tool-specific accessibility breakdowns further added complexity to organizational workflows. Razz elaborated how arranging a large archive of drawings required navigating grids of small thumbnails, a process that took them hours or even days: “*Sorting can be really frustrating because I’m looking at these tiny icons and I’m like, what is that?... I get really mad at trying to figure out where it goes.*” In the most consequential case of accessibility failure, Olivia abandoned beadwork altogether because she could not figure out “*a good system... to organize all the different colored beads and keep*

everything straight, because it took a lot of mental capacity.” The cognitive overload of organizing beads outweighed the joy of making, which pushed her away from the creative medium despite her interest. Thus, (in)accessibility in idea organization fundamentally determines which creative forms BLV creators could pursue and sustain over time.

4.3.4 Revisiting and Retrieving Ideas. Many participants proactively revisited their documented ideas to spark innovative thoughts. For example, Barbara recalled wandering through her poetry folders not to locate a specific piece but to discover future directions. However, locating a specific idea from a large archive required deliberate search strategies. The most common approach was keyword-based query, which depended on participants having already named documents, notes, or voice recordings with searchable terms they could recall later (Section 4.3.3). Within individual files, participants relied on headers, tabs, paragraphs, bookmarks, and comments to “*quickly jump between different parts*” (Marco) using screen readers. When keyword search failed, participants fell back on other contextual cues. Joseph listened to “*short snippets*” of recordings until he found what he was looking for. Razz compensated for date-based file organization by remembering what they drew before and after a given piece, using temporal context as a navigation aid.

However, search interfaces often introduced accessibility breakdowns, compounding participants’ frustration with forgetting their labeling conventions. Adrian detailed the challenge of locating highlighted search results while using screen magnification (Figure 5c), which required zooming out (making text too small to read) or zooming in (losing spatial context): “*Imagine you’re going back and forth between just the [search] box and this sea of fuzziness [in the document].*” The visual presentation of search results (small, colored highlights scattered across a document) was ineffective for low-vision users who could not simultaneously see the search box and the result in its surrounding context [119]. These examples emphasize the need for accessible search and retrieval systems that preserve context, infer intent, and reduce the organizational labor that currently falls disproportionately on BLV creators, who do not rely on visual scanning to locate content.

4.4 Evaluating and Iterating on Ideas

BLV creators iteratively evaluated and refined their ideas through feedback from trusted people and AI tools that served as both evaluation aids and generative partners.

4.4.1 Seeking and Cultivating Human Feedback. Participants sought feedback from other people on their initial ideas, intermediate drafts, or near-finished artifacts. They chose feedback sources based on their creative goals and the type of input needed. Olivia fluidly switched between a blind and a sighted friend depending on whether she wanted help with accessible patterns or visual components of the work. Many participants mentioned honest, unfiltered feedback as the most important quality they sought, and the hardest to obtain. They described a trend of receiving feedback softened by ableist assumptions that encouragement was more important to BLV creators than feedback accuracy. Jennifer G expressed frustration with “*people using too much filter of ‘I don’t want to hurt your feelings’ or ‘a blind person made it, so it’s got to be really good.’*”



Figure 6: Examples of participant work: (a) Leslie's leather pouch where its body and cuff have contrasting colors, and (b) Ann's butterfly with cheetah print, made by cutting paper with glossy finish.

To counter this, participants had to “train” their friends, family, or close collaborators over time “to give me the information I’m looking for” (Leslie). Building this trust was a long process that might even take “five years to get to this point” (Jennifer W) but necessary for sustaining reliable critical evaluation.

When general feedback proved evasive or insufficient, participants adopted targeted questioning strategies. Instead of open-ended questions (e.g., “how does this look?”), Leslie asked precise questions that could uncover potential errors in her work-in-progress (Figure 6a): “Can you see any of the natural colors of the belt underneath the black? Are there areas that are lighter or darker than others where I might need to go back?” These leading questions helped transform non-expert sighted observers into useful evaluators by giving them specific criteria instead of requiring aesthetic judgment they lacked the knowledge to provide.

Participants also carefully decided the formats in which an idea would be the most perceivable to their evaluators. Marco and Leslie used tactile sketches and cardboard models to get feedback from blind collaborators. In contrast, when working with sighted collaborators on an infographic, Angela found that neither verbal descriptions nor rough sketches adequately communicated her ideas: “I can see it in my brain, but I can’t get it out for people to understand verbally.” To resolve this, she uploaded her rough sketch to AI, had it render a cleaner version, and showed that to her colleagues. Thus, Angela used AI as a translation layer between her sketch and a visual representation that sighted collaborators could engage with.

Despite these carefully cultivated feedback strategies, several participants expressed frustration at their dependency on others for visual assessment of low-level details, from color to layout to appearance of final artifacts. Adam described how such dependency progressively narrowed his role only as “the idea creator... as far as the rough draft stage... Pretty much every aspect of evaluation, I’m dependent on somebody else to verify that it looks good... Intellectually I could do it, but physically I have not found a way to do it on my own.” The lack of accessible and reliable visual evaluation tools reduced BLV creators’ creative control and autonomy in late-stage decision-making where ideas are finalized and committed.

4.4.2 Leveraging AI for Evaluation and Iteration. AI tools served as an important mechanism to evaluate and iterate on ideas, partially

addressing the dependency on human feedback described above. For instance, while using the sgraffito technique (a technique in ceramics where an artist scratches through a top layer of glaze to reveal a contrasting underlying layer), Ahmet took pictures of red slip layered over white clay and asked AI whether the white clay was visible through the carved areas: “Because I was not sure if I was carving deep enough.” Rapid AI verification in intermediate stages saved him time and cost before fully constructing an artifact that would not align with his expectation. However, AI’s perceptual capabilities were limited for fine-grained visual evaluation. Jennifer G found AI could not reliably assess scale and spatial relationships, i.e., “if things are really where you want them.” Others used AI to check which colors “go well together” (Leslie) but found AI color identification frequently inaccurate. Depending on lighting and camera angle of the image (which were difficult to control for BLV creators), AI struggled to identify textures and patterns—the very qualities central to BLV creators’ aesthetic decision-making. Ann described her frustration (Figure 6b): “It doesn’t tell you it’s a cheetah print. You have to move the [camera] around to see if it says brown or brown and beige. Then you’re like, well, maybe this isn’t one color. Maybe this is a pattern.” Many participants adopted an iterative verification strategy by checking artifacts with (one or more) AI tools for an initial assessment, followed by confirmation from a trusted sighted person.

Furthermore, several participants drew a sharp distinction between wanting AI to describe what was there versus interpreting what the work meant. Angela elaborated: “Sometimes Be My AI unprompted gives you ‘evokes a warm cozy feeling’ or whatever. I don’t want to hear that... Because the aesthetic pieces are the parts that I have autonomy and control over. If AI thinks something, it might influence me in a way that I didn’t really want.” Angela preferred to get objective descriptions first and then optionally engage AI in “a critical art conversation” that raises open-ended questions rather than imposing interpretive judgments. Relatedly, participants’ opinions diverged regarding AI’s role as critical art evaluators. For example, Joseph and Razz characterized AI’s feedback as “disingenuous” and “soulless,” but Adrian programmed three AI-generated art critic personas and found that those personas offered “stereotypical but frankly, diverse and meaningful opinions” on his work.

4.4.3 Translating Ideas into Concrete Artifacts. Across the idea capture, organization, evaluation and iteration stages, we observed a challenge in bridging the gap between the modalities in which ideas were captured and the modalities in which artifacts were actually produced. This cross-modal translation became a site of creative problem-solving but also produced significant friction.

Participants adopted various domain-specific tools to ensure fidelity between ideas and output. Joseph paired tunes with specific instruments (e.g., drums for rhythm, piano for jazz) to solidify his internal ideas. Others working in tactile, fiber, or mixed-media domains, however, navigated a more complex idea-to-artifact pipeline. Ideas might be captured in notes, voice memos, or generated from AI descriptions of reference images. This text or voice-based record, however detailed, could not capture the tactile qualities of the paper participants would cut, the way yarn would drape, or how clay would respond to shaping. Nora reflected on this gap between imagination and realization: “I might have ideas in my mind, but from

being an idea to becoming a concrete object, it's a big route away... Only a few are able to move along. Many others just stay as ideas." Likewise, Ahmet encountered a misalignment between creative intent and what the materials or techniques at his disposal could physically support: *"Sometimes I have this really cool shape in my mind and I try to make it... My technique is not good enough or the image I'm trying to create is physically not possible with clay."*

These examples reveal a form of translation loss that goes beyond accessibility barriers. Even when participants had captured a detailed idea through text or voice, the transfer to a fundamentally different production modality, where spatial relationships, material behavior, and sensory qualities determined the outcome, inevitably introduces gaps between what was envisioned and what could be realized. For sighted creators, visual monitoring can bridge some of this gap through continuous feedback as an idea takes material form (e.g., repeatedly checking a reference pattern while recreating it with beads). BLV creators, who lack this visual feedback loop, often could not detect mismatches between intent and execution until later stages, which made the translation process more cognitively demanding and prone to unrecoverable divergence from the original insight.

5 Discussion

5.1 Reconceptualizing Accessible Ideation Pathways

Our study traced how BLV creators navigate the ideation pathway—from how ableist norms constrain which creative domains BLV individuals enter, to how ideas are generated and captured, to how they are organized, evaluated, and translated into artifacts (Figure 7).

5.1.1 Crippled ideation as a site of creativity. Destabilizing predominant terms of engagement (e.g., examining art by verbal description is inferior) [66, 79], participants forged creative pathways accounting for their interests and accessible possibilities [14, 20]. In this way, BLV creators engaged in what we term *"crippled ideation."* We distinguish this from *"accessible ideation,"* which typically asks how barriers to an existing, vision-dominant process can be removed, often through external support (e.g., screen-reader compatible tools), leaving the process itself intact and treating approximation to sighted workflows as the measure of success. Crippled ideation instead holds that disability reconstitutes the ideation process itself and foregrounds the disability-borne ingenuity our participants developed. This framing draws on the notion of *crip technoscience* [52] that understands disabled people as everyday designers and makers rather than passive recipients of accommodation. We observed that resolving accessibility did not situate participants into sighted forms of expression but shaped how they encountered, processed, and incorporated references into their work [42, 52, 66, 114]. Thus, crippled ideation reinforces that embodied and multisensory competencies are not nonvisual substitutes for sighted methods but the substance of creative thinking, generative in their own right.

We found that disabled knowing was foundational in creative practices, such as Mia taking up imprecision as an aesthetic principle [118], orienting her to engage with carpentry through carving, where artifacts responded to her movements, rather than Mia

following predetermined forms common in furniture making. Crucially, we demonstrate how crippled ideation comprised a constellation of activities, many of which were invisible in final work [18, 36]. Participants captured ideas responsive to their sensemaking, e.g., Ahmet's totebags of tactile inspirations. However, many sources of inspiration separate the ideators from their references, whether pinned among hundreds of photographed variations or displayed at art fairs. Participants had to translate what caught their attention into information for later reference. They appropriated text to archive ideas, yet their annotations extended beyond the visual details common in image description formats. Participants instead recorded rich descriptions of sensory elements (Leslie), emphasized *"swirly"* textures (Olivia), and composed narratives about a mixed-media piece they envisioned from the inspiration (Ann). While organizational infrastructures foreground storage schemes according to material properties (e.g., color), Lindsay understood her embodied relationship to materials as an efficient spatial reference during beadwork. Muscle memory made visual scanning unnecessary, rendering phrases like *"red on my left knee"* meaningful indexes, blending organizational strategies with making practices. To evaluate their ideas critically, participants curated others' feedback (Leslie) and automated descriptions, developing protocols which redirected infantilizing praise (Jennifer W) and interpretations (Angela) into conversations with constructive suggestions. Often cast as a fleeting phase, *ideation itself became a site for accessible creativity.* BLV participants developed everyday material, sensory, and cognitive competencies into ideation [99]; frictions with visual-dominant approaches surfaced the multi-faceted negotiations of idea management.

5.1.2 Ableism and the narrowing funnel of ideation pathways. Lewis [74] defined ableism as "a system of assigning value to people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness." We observed ableism operating at multiple levels. Socially and institutionally, participants were discouraged from visual arts as children (Adrian), denied accommodations in art school (Angela), redirected toward *"more accessible"* professions (Ann), and unwelcome in professional studios (Ahmet). These obstacles are rooted in gatekeeping assumptions about what counts as legitimate artistic practice, who is recognized as an artist, and what bodies and senses are considered prerequisite for creative work [13, 20, 42, 79].

Critically, tool inaccessibility reinforces and extends these social constraints. A tool that assumes its user can see amplifies, through its design, ableism by communicating a judgment that the sighted bodymind is the legitimate, capable, or default creator [11, 14, 20], and this judgment becomes structural when it circulates through and is reinforced by social and institutional settings that provide a welcome home for these visual-dominant tools. In the creative ecosystem our participants navigated, we observed that sight-centric tools and ableist attitudes co-produced one another. Thus, present-day inaccessible tools can carry forward a value system whose attitudinal form participants may have first encountered decades earlier. An art instructor who believes that blind students cannot authentically engage with visual art is unlikely to advocate for accessible design tools; and inaccessible tools, in turn, confirm the instructor's assumption by preventing blind students

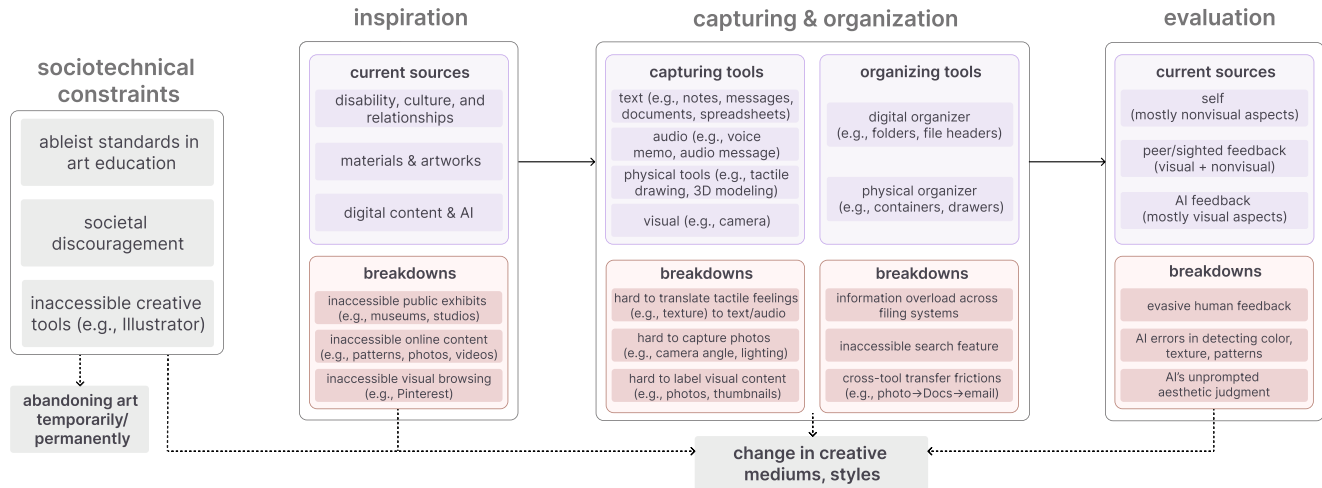


Figure 7: An overview of BLV creators' ideation pathways. It summarizes sociotechnical constraints surrounding creative work, the sources and tools participants currently use for seeking inspiration, capturing and organizing ideas, and evaluating ideas. Across these ideation activities, participants experienced different accessibility breakdowns. Together with sociotechnical constraints, these breakdowns can lead to severe consequences including changes in creative mediums, styles and even temporary or permanent abandonment of creative work.

from demonstrating creative capacity. This mutually reinforcing dynamic means that tool inaccessibility is part of the same system that feeds ableist attitudes in creative work.

Moreover, the consequences of technological failures amplify as they cascade across ideation stages. A blind creator who cannot visually scan Pinterest must process images one-by-one, often through AI description pipelines, resulting in a “*slow vision*” (Leslie) stripped of comparative and serendipitous qualities of rapid browsing for getting *inspiration*. When that creator *captures* an idea drawn from embodied interaction with nature in Notes or Voice Memo, the encounter’s sensory richness (texture, weight, temperature) may resist translation into words, producing records that may not engender the original imagination when *revisited*. When *organizing* those records, the absence of cross-platform labeling and inaccessible search features intensify *retrieval* friction. When evaluating work in-progress, AI tools that cannot reliably assess fine-grained visual details (colors, textures, patterns) force multi-round *evaluation* with human reviewers, who themselves may provide infantilizing feedback (Figure 1).

A single breakdown in this workflow may not appear catastrophic in isolation, but their accumulation produces a narrowing funnel where each unaddressed failure filters out creative possibilities for BLV creators before their ideas can be realized. Recalling participant examples, Olivia abandoned beadwork because she could not develop an accessible organizational system for colored beads, and Nora’s shelf of unrealized ideas still remained “*a big route away*” from becoming concrete objects. Rather, inconsistencies in participant’s journeys when pursuing complementary paths demonstrate the expansive role of ableism, outright falsely declaring impossibility, and the limitations of accessibility research hyperfocusing on BLV individuals’ consumer experiences of technologies.

5.1.3 Repairing and amplifying ideation infrastructure. Responding to ableism at multiple levels implicates how we conceptualize accessible ideation infrastructure. If we frame the design goal as replicating sighted workflows through nonvisual means, we miss the generative potential of the practices BLV creators have developed. Instead, accessible ideation support should pursue two complementary goals: *repairing* the narrowing funnel by addressing ableism in sociotechnical ecosystems, and *amplifying* the distinctive practices that BLV creators have developed, such as embodied spatial organization, tactile-first material selection, and multisensory creative reasoning, rather than forcing these practices into visual-centric creativity frameworks [61, 104, 111].

Building this infrastructure is also a collective responsibility. Art educators must develop non-visual pedagogies, professional spaces must cultivate disability-friendly norms, and technology developers must calibrate systems to align with the sensory priorities and skills of disabled creators. While pedagogy development exceeds accessibility research, we have responsibility to configure the possibilities and messages that reverberate through digital tooling and experiences taken up across other sectors—tools which make up the aforementioned ecosystems and institutions. This accountability extends the anti-ableism work of accessibility from an end-user focus to address different levels of discrimination. Expressing anti-ableism through creativity tooling can take many forms, from possible interactions, to collaborative capabilities, to who is represented. Key questions which may evaluate impacts on the surrounding ecosystem include: What is communicated about disability to someone uninformed about diverse sensory engagement? Are certain forms of engagement better represented or easier? How do collaborative capabilities enable multiple modalities and translations? Can different forms of engagement create a hierarchy of expression based on how the tool works? Importantly, expanding

accessibility research from optimizing end-user experiences to accounting for messaging about capabilities widens funneled creative pathways by signaling that disabled creators are expected.

5.2 Design Implications for Accessible Ideation Support

Below we outline future design opportunities to support BLV creators across various ideation activities. In addition to making ideation tools more accessible by repairing the breakdowns at each ideation phase, the notion of crippled ideation encourages us to amplify BLV creators' disability-borne practices and strategies. However, technological improvements must happen alongside, rather than apart from, changes in broader social, pedagogical, and organizational practices to ensure accessibility in ideation.

5.2.1 Preserve sensory context of inspirational sources. BLV creators' innovative ideas often originated through crippled ideation, including their embodied engagement with physical materials and multi-sensory experiences [60, 93, 121]. Yet, idea capturing tools (Voice Memo, Notes) cannot fully preserve multi-sensory qualities. Future ideation tools should explore accessible ways to embed sensory context. Tools could probe for structured sensory descriptions (e.g., texture analogies, weight comparisons). Guided ideation frameworks could help creators record their reflective conversations with the materials' multisensory properties (e.g., touches like, smells like, sounds like) [108, 127].

5.2.2 Enhance nonvisual browsing and discovery at scale. Visual discovery platforms support rapid, parallel scanning of hundreds of images, while screen reader access relies on sequential processing [38]. This interaction gap exacerbates when images lack descriptions, forcing BLV creators into a time-consuming process of interpreting each image one-by-one through AI tools. Future systems should support efficient nonvisual browsing of large collections. AI-generated summaries could characterize a collection at a high level (e.g., "42 images, mostly mid-century furniture with warm wood tones and angular forms, 8 featuring metal accents") before users commit to individual items [92]. Comparative browsing could surface similarities and differences across images [57], while user-defined filters could reorder cluttered collections [123] by creators' desired properties (e.g., style, texture, material).

Re-discovering ideas presented unique challenges, as search interfaces were difficult to navigate with magnifiers. Future systems could infer users' intent through approximation and context-preserving search capabilities. Results could be presented within their spatial surroundings, with targeted highlighting and clear, low vision-traceable connections between search results and the content they reference.

5.2.3 Calibrate AI as an accessible ideation partner and mediator. BLV creators frequently draw inspiration from conversations with peers and AI [109]. Future ideation tools could explore AI as a mediator in ability-diverse teams to bridge modality differences between collaborators' preferred tools. For example, AI could translate a visual-centric whiteboard into structured text descriptions following logical reading orders for BLV collaborators [77], or visually render BLV creators' tactile sketches [96] for sighted colleagues. Creators could further offload overwhelming administrative tasks

to AI, such as developing organizational systems, automatically implementing them across storage tools (e.g., notes, photos), and providing the context to ease the aforementioned retrieval barriers.

AI could also support modality-aware and skill-aware interaction where suggestions are tailored to BLV creators' preferred medium and creative styles rather than defaulting to visual norms or oversimplified techniques. For instance, to facilitate more inclusive learning environments, pedagogical approaches that emphasize flexible sensory engagement with art can be paired with AI tools that help instructors design and customize multimodal assignments for students to enhance spatial and tactile perception skills.

5.2.4 Bridge physical and digital organizational systems. Our analysis shows a disconnect between organizational tools across modalities (e.g., text, audio, tactile). Participants desired centralized systems that would help manage scattered ideas in one place [62, 63, 102, 104]. However, this integrated system should not require abandoning their existing organizational practices, as many participants had developed effective ideation workflows. Instead, future systems could act as a "translation layer" that links physical locations of materials or in-progress artifacts (e.g., top container, second shelf) with corresponding digital records (e.g., image folder, file path) and identification tags (e.g., braille labels, audio notes [73, 95]). This way, systems could reduce the effort of transferring between formats and platforms while preserving BLV creators' personalized organizational setup.

5.2.5 Support effective idea evaluation. While design literature characterizes effective feedback as specific, justified, and actionable [41, 53, 86, 105, 112], BLV creators desired *honest* feedback instead of overly-positive, evasive reactions. Although AI can now offer immediate, on-demand feedback [41, 76], these tools also have sycophantic tendencies to appease users [25]. Unlike factual errors [116] that can be cross-checked with external sources, sycophantic feedback is an example of ungrounded output from predictive models that demonstrates how visual interpretations can increase labor by being harder to verify. Furthermore, BLV individuals already face heightened difficulties in verifying AI suggestions independently [4, 5] and tend to overtrust and overrely on AI [1]. To ensure effective idea evaluation, future tools should clearly separate evidence-based critiques from interpretive commentary. AI could first provide observations grounded in art and design principles (e.g., form, line, spacing, composition) and then offer aesthetic judgment only if requested. This aligns with heuristics-based evaluation tools that provide clear evidence for detected issues [56, 125].

6 Conclusion

This paper uncovers how BLV creators across diverse domains generate, capture, organize, and evaluate creative ideas and the barriers and practices that shape their ideation process. Our findings demonstrate that social constraints and tool inaccessibility compound across the ideation pathway, progressively narrowing which creative possibilities BLV individuals can envision, pursue, and realize. As digital tools and AI increasingly mediate creative workflows, there is a timely opportunity to design accessible ideation support tools calibrated to disabled creators' sensory priorities and oriented

toward expanding their creative agency. We hope this work encourages accessibility researchers to look beyond individual production tools, toward the fuller ecology of practices, relationships, and systems that make creative ideation possible.

Acknowledgments

We thank our participants for their contributions to the study and reviewers for their feedback. We also thank NEU TEA Lab members for their support. This work was supported in part by the National Science Foundation grant IIS 2543250 and Khoury College Research Resilience Seed Grant.

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A Appendix

Table 2: Assistive technologies (ATs) and ideation technologies used by the first half of interview participants. The asterisks (*) denote pseudonyms.

Name	ATs used	Technologies used for ideation		
		Inspiration	Capture / Organization	Evaluation
Marco	Screen readers	None	Note-taking apps, document editors, mark-down documents (MacDown), physical tools (braille printout, tactile graphic)	Online forums, social media/messaging apps, email/chat-based tools, AI tools (Be My AI)
Precious	Screen readers, braille displays	Online search, social media (TikTok), media platforms (Spotify), AI tools (Be My AI)	Audio recording (voice memo), note-taking apps, braille note taker (BrailleSense) , document editors (Google Docs, Google Sheets), online storage tools (Google Drive), Digital Audio Workstation (Logic Pro, Pro Tools), YouTube	Online forums, social media/messaging apps, AI tools, email/chat-based tools
Sophie	Screen readers, braille displays	Online search, media platforms, AI tools, Bookshare, documentaries	Document editors, braille note taker (HumanWare)	Social media/messaging apps, email/chat-based tools
Leslie	Screen readers	Online search (Google), media platforms (YouTube), AI tools (ChatGPT, Siri), social media, email lists for woodworking	Audio recording (voice memo), note-taking apps, document editors (Microsoft Word), physical tools (a slate and stylus with sticky notes and little braille post-it notes), online storage tools	Social media/messaging apps, email/chat-based tools
Mia*	Magnification	Online search (Google), media platforms (YouTube), reference managers, email lists of quilt and woodworking stores	Document editors (Google Docs), spreadsheets, physical tools (drawers), online storage tools (Google Drive), text to self via Siri	In some cases via email or phone call, rarely in text
Nora*	Screen readers	Online search (Google), social media (Facebook), media platforms, content collection tools, reference managers, AI tools.	Audio recording (voice memo), note-taking apps, document editors, social media/messaging apps, physical tools	Online forums, social media/messaging apps, AI tools, email/chat-based tools
Joseph	Screen readers (NVDA)	Social media (Mastodon), media platforms (Apple Music, Spotify, YouTube)	Audio recording (voice memo), social media/messaging apps (iMessage, audio message), online storage tools (Dropbox), voice conference system (TeamTalk)	Social media/messaging apps, TeamTalk
Emma*	Screen readers, braille displays, text-to-speech	Online search, AI tools, podcasts	Physical tools (large paper/poster on wall, drawers), online storage tools, note-taking apps, audio recording (voice memo), document editors (Google Docs, Pages), social media/messaging apps	Online forums
Olivia*	Screen readers, braille displays	Online search, social media (Facebook group), media platforms (YouTube), AI tools (ChatGPT, Copilot, Meta Glass), content collection tools (Pinterest)	Audio recording, document editors (Microsoft Word), spreadsheets, physical tools (containers, drawers, cubbies, braille display, raised line on the paper), online storage tools	Online forums, social media/messaging apps, AI tools, email/chat-based tools
Lindsay	Screen readers, magnification, text-to-speech	Online search (Google), social media (Facebook Group, TikTok), media platforms, content collection tools, online shops (Etsy, Amazon)	Note-taking apps, social media/messaging apps (WhatsApp), online storage tools (OneDrive), physical tools (shoe organizer)	Social media/messaging apps

Table 3: Assistive technologies (ATs) and ideation technologies used by the second half of interview participants.

Name	ATs used	Technologies used for ideation		
		Inspiration	Capture / Organization	Evaluation
Adrian	Magnification	Online search (Google), social media, media platforms, AI tools (ChatGPT, DALL-E)	Note-taking apps, document editors, spreadsheets, presentation tools (Microsoft PowerPoint, Keynote), online storage tools, Figma, Blender, Illustrator, Photoshop	AI tools
Jennifer G	Screen readers	Online search, social media (Facebook group), media platforms, podcasts, AI tools (Be My AI, ChatGPT, AIRA)	Audio recording (voice memo), note-taking apps, document editors (Microsoft Word, Google Docs), social media/messaging apps (Instagram), online storage tools	Social media/messaging apps, email/chat-based tools
Jennifer W	Magnification, CCTV	Online search, media platforms (YouTube), podcasts/blogs, AI tools (Gemini, ChatGPT), social media (Facebook)	Document editors, online storage tools, Canva	Social media/messaging apps, email/chat-based tools
Ahmet	Screen readers	None	Audio recording, note-taking apps, social media/messaging apps, online storage tools (Dropbox), physical tools (containers, tow bags)	Online forums, Google to verify AI response, online groups (Facebook groups), email/call
Ann	Screen readers, text-to-speech	media platforms (YouTube), social media (Facebook), blogs, AI tools (Perplexity, ChatGPT, Copilot), online search	Document editors (Microsoft Word), spreadsheets, Audio recording (voice memo), note-taking apps, newsletter/blog	FaceTime, AI tools, email, blog comments
Razz	Screen readers, large display adjustments, custom resolution, dark mode	Online search, social media, media platforms (YouTube), podcasts/blogs, content collection tools	Procreate, personal website, Note-taking apps, document editors, social media/messaging apps, email, physical tools (notebook), online storage tools	Online forums, social media/messaging apps, email/chat-based tools
Angela	Screen readers, braille displays, text-to-speech	Online search, podcasts/blogs, AI tools (ChatGPT)	Note-taking apps, journal apps, document editors, physical tools	Email/chat-based tools, AI tools
Jessica	Screen readers, magnification	Media platforms (YouTube), podcasts, content collection tools, social media (Mastodon, Facebook), mailing list	Audio recording (Voice memo, OBS Studio, Reaper), document editors (Microsoft Word), Procreate, social media/messaging apps, presentation tools, online storage tools, digital audio workstation session files, plugin presets	Online discussion forums, social media/messaging app, email/chat-based tools
Adam	Braille displays, screen readers, text-to-speech	AI tools (ChatGPT, Sono), podcasts, media platforms (YouTube), email listserv, online search (Google), social media (Facebook)	Audio recording (Victor Stream, Reaper, voice memo), document editors (Microsoft Word), email, reminders, note-taking apps, Victor Trek	AI tools, email/chat-based tools
Barbara	Screen readers, braille displays	Online search, AI tools (ChatGPT), social media (Facebook)	braille paper, braille note taker, document editors, online storage tools (Dropbox)	AI tools, social media