Advances in Archaeological Practice (2026), 1–14
doi:10.1017/aap.2026.10180

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ARTICLE

Slow, Digital, Immersive, Accessible: A Crip Studies–Centered Framework for Inclusive Archaeological Practice

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(Received 31 December 2025 UTC; revised 18 July 2026 UTC; accepted 22 July 2026 UTC)

Abstract

Archaeological practice has historically privileged fieldwork-intensive methodologies that systematically exclude practitioners whose bodies, minds, or life circumstances diverge from disciplinary norms. Drawing on crip theory and intersectional disability studies, this article uses the *Homo archaeologus* archetype—an often idealized archaeologist characterized by able-bodiedness, neurotypicality, cisgender identity, and physical presence in the field—which functions as both professional stereotype and gatekeeping mechanism. I argue that moving beyond accommodation-based approaches toward accessibility-centered design transforms not only who can participate in archaeology but what the discipline can know. This article proposes a four-pillar framework for inclusive archaeological practice: (1) *Slow*, restructuring temporal rhythms to prioritize deliberation over efficiency; (2) *Digital*, integrating computational methods as core archaeology rather than post-fieldwork analysis; (3) *Immersive*, employing technologies such as photogrammetry and virtual reality (VR) to multiply modes of engagement with archaeological contexts; and (4) *Accessible*, designing projects from the outset for diverse participation rather than retrofitting accommodations afterward. Through case studies from archaeological projects, I show that these pillars, in one form or another, are already operational in contemporary practice and that recognizing marginalized practitioners as methodological innovators—rather than problems requiring accommodation—strengthens archaeological rigor while expanding epistemic possibilities. This framework reframes accessibility not as an optional enhancement but as a fundamental methodology that benefits all practitioners while centering those historically excluded from disciplinary legitimacy.

Resumen

La práctica arqueológica ha privilegiado históricamente metodologías que, al requerir trabajo de campo intensivo, excluyen por defecto a los y las arqueólogas cuyos cuerpos, mentes o circunstancias de vida se apartan de las normas disciplinarias. Usando teoría crip, interseccionalidad y estudios de discapacidad, este artículo emplea el arquetipo del Homo archaeologus, la figura de un arqueólogo idealizado, usualmente hombre, que se caracteriza por su capacidad física, neurotipicidad, identidad cisgénero y heterosexual, y sobre todo por su extensa experiencia en trabajo de campo, que funciona tanto como estereotipo profesional como mecanismo de exclusión. En este texto, argumento que debemos ir más allá de los diseños que proponen simples medidas de inclusión, y mirar en cambio hacia un diseño que incorpore la accesibilidad desde el inicio, para transformar verdaderamente tanto el perfil de quienes practican la arqueología como lo que estos pueden aportar a la disciplina. Este artículo propone un marco de cuatro pilares para una práctica arqueológica inclusiva: *Lento*, que reestructura los tiempos y ritmos de trabajo para priorizar la reflexión sobre la eficiencia; *Digital*, que integra los métodos computacionales no solo como análisis posterior al trabajo de campo, sino como parte activa de la recolección de datos; *Inmerso*, que emplea tecnologías como la fotogrametría y la realidad virtual para expandir las formas de registrar y revisitar los contextos arqueológicos; y *Accesible*, que diseña proyectos para una participación diversa desde el principio, en lugar de incorporar acomodaciones a posteriori. A través de estudios de caso de proyectos arqueológicos, demuestro que estos pilares ya están en uso en la práctica contemporánea.

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Asimismo, argumento que los y las arqueólogas históricamente marginalizados deben ser reconocidos como participantes activos y diseñadores de nuevas metodologías inclusivas, no simplemente como problemas que deben resolverse, pues su incorporación amplía el conjunto de perspectivas disciplinarias, fortalece el rigor metodológico y expande las posibilidades epistémicas. El marco presentado redefine la accesibilidad no como una propuesta de inclusión opcional, sino como una metodología fundamental que incorpora puntos de vista históricamente ignorados.

Keywords: accessibility; crip theory; digital archaeology; inclusive practice; slow archaeology

Palabras clave: accesibilidad; teoría crip; arqueología digital; práctica inclusiva; arqueología lenta

The "Joke" That Wasn't

I always start my talks with the same joke: as a researcher focused on satellite site detection and multispectral analysis, I recommend working with computers, which has allowed me to avoid long, uncomfortable field seasons and get back to my daily morning coffee at home quickly. But this was never an innocent joke. It was a disclaimer. To be perceived as a legitimate archaeologist, I felt I needed to demonstrate physical skill, embody predefined gender norms, and perform devotion to fieldwork as the discipline's pinnacle. Even writing from a position of relative institutional privilege—a tenure-track, female, international faculty member at a North American research university—I had learned that it was better to be part of the joke than not. Over time, I came to recognize that what I had read as personal discomfort was directly tied to my neurodivergence and its physical symptoms (Csecs et al. 2022) and that my queerness shaped how I navigated field seasons in ways my colleagues did not have to consider.

My experience is not exceptional. It points to something systematic about archaeology itself—that we need to preemptively show ourselves as outliers and laugh about it, rather than not belong. Simeonoff and colleagues (2026) have argued a similar point, based on their survey results which emphasize the expectations among archaeologists to be "tough enough" and the pressure they feel to push themselves beyond their limits to "fit" into the field. The framework I propose, then, is informed by that vantage point and my own experiences, but my argument is structural: despite growing discussions of accessibility, multivocality, and positionality, our reverence for what counts as "real" archaeological work remains embedded in normative frameworks that operate as practical gatekeeping mechanisms.

Critiques of these norms are not new. Gero's (1985) analysis of the gendered politics of fieldwork established early that the field/lab divide encodes a masculinist hierarchy of legitimacy. Kurnick and Fladd (2026) have traced how feminist equity critiques in archaeology reach back to these origins, documenting more than 30 years of disparities in publication, grants, and hiring without commensurate structural change. Over two decades ago, Hall and colleagues (2002) documented how the visual culture, physical settings, everyday practices, and disciplinary norms of fieldwork can work to exclude or sideline disabled students, and Phillips and Gilchrist (2012:675) noted that archaeology "has long been seen as the preserve of young, fit, and healthy people." Durban (2022) more recently argues that anthropology's disciplinary foundations are built on ableist assumptions and practices. Calls for slow scholarship have circulated across the social sciences since the mid-2010s, with Chazan (2023) extending the argument through "crip time," which multiplies enfolded temporalities reclaimed by researchers living with disabilities and chronic illness.

The pattern is striking: arguments for inclusion and accessibility in archaeology have been made, heard, praised, and absorbed into the discipline's margins without restructuring its core. Heath-Stout and Hannigan (2020) found that field-school costs remain prohibitive and that scholarships in the discipline lack both reach and efficacy because they leave the institutionalized inequality at the root of the problem intact. In this article, I posit that crip theory is an ideal framework for connecting our lofty goals with our actual practice. Hamraie and Fritsch (2019:1) define crip technoscience in the "Crip Technoscience Manifesto" as "practices of critique, alteration, and reinvention of our material-discursive world," positioning disabled people as "experts and designers of everyday life," not recipients of improved

systems. This significantly expands Fraser's (2007) often cited Universal Design principles, which emphasize ideas of accessibility yet lack crip theory's insistence that disabled and marginalized practitioners are active methodological innovators rather than users to be accommodated. This article does not aim to be an identification of these problems; instead, it contributes their *systematization* through a coherent methodological framework that is rooted in crip theory's epistemological radicalism and that builds on the current state of archaeological praxis and potential. I propose four interconnected pillars: (1) *Slow*, moving away from efficiency-driven models toward intentional practice; (2) *Digital,* integrating computational methods as core archaeology; (3) *Immersive*, multiplying ways to engage with archaeological context; and (4) *Accessible*, designing from the outset for diverse participation. These practices are already underway in contemporary archaeology; the framework names them, connects them, and articulates their epistemic stakes. The pillar metaphor matters: pillars function simultaneously rather than hierarchically; each can stand alone, and, crucially, they are visible and inspectable, aligning with crip technoscience's demand that we surface the assumptions and power dynamics embedded in our tools and practices.

Theoretical Groundings: Moving Past the *Homo archaeologus* as Disciplinary Norm

At a conference on digital methods a few years ago, a senior colleague used the discussion period to reflect on how far the discipline had come since its "great discoveries," suggesting that early archaeologists had not needed GIS or computers to grasp the spatial layout and function of sites. They had relied, he argued, on deep observation and the act of being there as the epistemological foundation of archaeology. Underlying his remarks was less a concern about technological progress than a romanticization of an earlier, ostensibly purer mode of practice—one that was also, though left unstated, able bodied, male, and frequently colonial. I have since adopted the term *Homo archaeologus* as an umbrella concept for this ideal archaeologist: usually white, male, cisgender, able bodied, neurotypical, and heterosexual, embedded in both disciplinary culture and popular imagination (Moshenska 2017). Moser's (2007:241) analysis of Australian archaeology shows the archetype has deep historical roots: nineteenth-century geologists adopted "the identity of miners, who were widely perceived as dirty, tough, practical outdoors types," and this appropriation of working-class masculine identity became constitutive of how geology—and subsequently archaeology—defined professional legitimacy. The Indiana Jones franchise did not invent this archetype; it crystallized and globally circulated expectations already embedded in archaeological culture.

Three features of the *Homo archaeologus* structure the analysis that follows. First, the archetype is able bodied and physically resilient. McRuer's (2006) concept of "compulsory able-bodiedness" illuminates how the discipline's privileging of certain bodies and minds appears natural rather than chosen. Schalk and Kim (2020) argue that archaeology assumes that all archaeologists are nondisabled. That physical presence in the field is the baseline of legitimacy—an assumption that renders invisible not only disabled archaeologists but the diverse ways of knowing and contributing that disability perspectives offer.

Second, the *Homo archaeologus* is a mechanism of disciplinary reproduction, not a neutral stereotype. Archaeological culture systematically valorizes what Moser (2007:259) calls "everything connected with the active (and actively) heterosexual male," and senior archaeologists evaluate professional skill through "social fit," requiring both men and women to become "one of the blokes" to succeed. Harassment and exclusion are encoded into professional socialization through mentorship: senior archaeologists induct junior ones into cultures of hypermasculine performance, sometimes coercing queer women into sexualized discussions about other team members (Heath-Stout 2023). This culture of sexism, homophobia, racism, and ableism has been documented largely for the United States, Europe, Australia, and Latin America, and its reach extends into digital practice: Hutson et alia (2023) find that women and Latin American–affiliated researchers are poorly represented in lidar publications, and Indigenous communities are absent from authorship entirely (Chirikure 2021; Díaz-Andreu 2025; Díaz-Andreu and Lopez Varela 2023; Tavera-Medina and Díaz-Andreu 2025).

Third, the archetype operates intersectionally. Building on Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) foundational framework of intersectionality, we see how multiple aspects of social identity overlap to "create, preserve, and compound social inequities" (Rivera Prince et al. 2022:385). Battle-Baptiste (2011) shows that

women of color face compounded barriers that multiply rather than simply add up; Blackmore (2011) and Blackmore et alia (2016) document how professional belonging requires heterosexual performance, noting that "it was hard to ignore when strong women, regardless of their sexuality, were called dykes by male professors" (Blackmore et al. 2016:20). Patricia Hill Collins's (2002) Black feminist standpoint theory makes a parallel epistemological claim: knowledge produced from marginalized positions is not merely more inclusive; it is more rigorous, because it surfaces the unexamined assumptions that dominant frameworks naturalize. Building on Gero (1985), feminist archaeologists have long shown that research processes are gendered: fieldwork is masculine coded, and lab and museum work feminine coded—a pattern that the *Homo archaeologus* actively reproduces (Heath-Stout 2023). This dichotomization is embedded in the spaces afforded to practitioners and in the reification of binaries: field/lab, physical/intellectual, legitimate/illegitimate. These codings do not operate through gender alone. They map onto race, disability, and queerness simultaneously: certain bodies are positioned as naturally field capable, and others are positioned as belonging at best to derivative work. Any framework capable of dismantling this logic must therefore be intersectional from the outset (Rivera Prince et al. 2022).

Crip theory offers archaeology something more radical than a more inclusive version of existing practice. Rather than asking how systems can be modified to accommodate more bodies, crip theory—as articulated by Kafer (2013), Hamraie (2016), and Hamraie and Fritsch (2019)—shifts the analytical frame entirely by asking: What has already been invented by practitioners whose circumstances do not fit disciplinary norms? This reorientation moves from deficit to innovation, from the question "how do we make space for disabled people?" to "what methodological breakthroughs emerge when we design with and for marginalized practitioners?" The distinction has direct methodological consequences. Hamraie (2016:261) insists that true accessibility requires transforming "material and cultural arrangements, real-time interactions, and physical spaces" rather than adjusting policies around existing structures. Heath-Stout's (2023:289) research on invisibly disabled archaeologists shows how practitioners with nonapparent disabilities must strategize "how to navigate careers in a discipline where they are subject to microaggressions, bullying and harassment, and systematic injustices," and in doing so, they develop reflective, adaptive, often more rigorous approaches. Crip theory asks us to recognize these survival strategies not as workarounds but as methodological innovations that the discipline has systematically failed to credit.

Indigenous archaeology has developed a convergent principle into methodological commitment: research agendas must be defined in partnership with descendant communities, not simply opened to their participation after the questions are already set (Atalay 2012; Gonzalez 2018). Together with crip theory and Black feminist standpoint theory, this is not a separate conversation but a parallel critique of who gets to define archaeological problems in the first place. The framework presented here builds on these convergent traditions: its four pillars are not accommodations layered onto existing practice but redesigns of practice itself, generated by attending to what practitioners working at the discipline's margins have already invented out of necessity.

The Four-Pillar Framework: Slow, Digital, Immersive, Accessible

Here, I propose a framework that builds the previous discussion into four interconnected pillars, each one addressing specific barriers in archaeological practice while generating innovations that transcend the problems they solve. Two clarifications, however, are necessary.

First, a note on terminology: throughout, "accessible" is used in a theoretically-specific sense that is rooted in crip theory rather than as shorthand for regulatory compliance or full multimodal design. As Kafer (2013) argues, accessibility is a political and relational practice, not a technical checklist. Applied to archaeology, this means that inaccessible field schools, compressed excavation schedules, and performance-based evaluation criteria are not neutral methodological choices but meaning-making systems that continuously reproduce the *Homo archaeologus* as the default practitioner.

Second, a caveat applies to all four pillars. Technologies marketed as "democratizing" archaeological practice can simultaneously concentrate power among well-resourced institutions and practitioners

(Kansa 2016; Sayre 2016). When digital and immersive documentation becomes the standard for "rigorous" practice, those who cannot afford the equipment are excluded from legitimacy—precisely the gatekeeping dynamic that the framework challenges. Each pillar must therefore be implemented with critical attention to who benefits and who is excluded.

Pillar 1: Slow Methodology

The first pillar asks a deceptively simple question: where could we intentionally decelerate? Slow is a descriptor of intention and cognitive register, not pace. Ellen Samuels's (2017) concept of "crip time" sharpens the point: when archaeology's efficiency imperative sets the pace, it is not applying a neutral standard but encoding a specific bodily norm into the discipline's structure. The demand for rapid productivity privileges practitioners who can work at hyperaccelerated paces and penalizes those who require different temporal rhythms. Neurodivergent practitioners, who need more time to process information and shift between tasks (Nishida 2016), and people with caregiving responsibilities who cannot sustain compressed field seasons (Warner et al. 2024) are a few examples of those who get left out. The solution is not to ask these practitioners to fit into existing timelines; instead, it is to ask whether the timelines themselves are justified.

The critique of accelerated production finds convergent support in emerging degrowth scholarship. Zorzin (2021) argues that since the 1980s, archaeology has been embedded in an accelerating neoliberal ideology to which most archaeologists have had no alternative but to adapt; Moshenska (2021) extends the critique to archaeological education and the neoliberal university. Both frame their interventions through economic and ecological sustainability rather than crip theory, but their conclusions converge with slow methodology's central claim: rapid productivity is not an organizational necessity but an ideological choice, with serious consequences regarding which individuals can participate in the discipline.

Selective deceleration supports adaptive research design—that is, practitioners reflecting on methods as they work—and enables meaningful participation from those historically excluded by temporal constraints. Although extending overall timelines is not always feasible, spaces of deceleration can be built into grant proposals from the outset by structuring reflection time into daily fieldwork routines: dedicated moments for writing, recording thoughts, and discussing observations. The goal is not to make every task take longer but to create deliberate cognitive space for reflection and iteration, and for practitioners who process information differently. Gonzalez's (2018) collaborative field practice with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde demonstrates the model: by subordinating excavation timelines to the Nation's seasonal ceremonial calendar and governance rhythms, the project restructured temporal authority itself, making Indigenous community priorities—rather than grant deadlines—the framework within which archaeological work unfolded.

Pillar 2: Digital Integration

Digital methods have long been part of archaeological research. Online learning platforms, computational methods, and remote-sensing technologies are often considered to have democratized access to the discipline (Daems 2020; Gordon et al. 2016). They have transformed the scale of research through remote sensing and image analysis (Oré Menendez 2025; Zimmer-Dauphinee et al. 2023) and through digital platforms that allow geographically distributed teams to contribute meaningfully (Gordon et al. 2016). However, digital technologies are also deployed in ways that reinforce the dichotomy between speedy fieldwork and longer postprocessing—a dichotomy that reflects the spaces accessible to different researchers.

Strategically deployed, digital tools do not undermine slow practice; they subsidize it. Photogrammetric recording that captures a stratigraphic profile in minutes makes that profile available for repeated, unhurried analysis indefinitely instead of forcing interpretation into the narrow window of active excavation. A researcher managing chronic illness who is also a skilled GIS analyst, for example, can identify site characteristics without traveling and contribute to spatial analysis as a full team member from home. Digital efficiency and methodological slowness are not in opposition; efficiency in data collection can purchase the temporal space that slow methodology requires. Digital methods do

not replace excavation and survey; they transform what archaeology can be and who can participate in it.

As digital tools proliferate, questions about who shapes digital infrastructure, who controls the data, who sets the terms of access, and whose communities bear the hidden costs become inseparable from the question of inclusion. Morgan's (2022) overview of digital archaeology argues that a future digital archaeology must move beyond skeuomorphic reproduction of previous structural inequalities to generate new archaeological imaginaries. Using a crip theory–centered digital framework to pursue this goal means we must address not only who can access digital tools but who controls the data those tools produce. The prevailing FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable; Barker 2022) have made data sharing more technically robust. Still, their data-centric logic leaves largely unaddressed the question of whose interests sharing serves. Two complementary frameworks developed by Indigenous communities directly challenge this gap. The CARE principles (Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, and Ethics; Carroll 2020) insist that data stewardship generate collective benefit and that communities hold authority over how their data is used. The First Nations Information Governance Centre's OCAP principles (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession) assert Indigenous jurisdiction over data at every stage of the data's life cycle (First Nations Information Governance Centre 2023). Together, CARE and OCAP reframe FAIR as a technical floor that must be built upon with people- and purpose-centered accountability.

Pillar 3: Immersive Approaches

When one stands in an excavation unit, observing the relationships between deposits, the color and texture of soil, or the spatial distribution of artifacts, one gains knowledge that photographs alone cannot capture (Tilley 1994). Yet, traditional fieldwork and its temporalities create a false choice between documentation and engagement. Excavation levels are rushed through; survey areas are quickly traversed. Immersive technologies address this paradox by multiplying what counts as archaeological engagement (Kyrlitsias et al. 2020). High-resolution 3D documentation—from photogrammetry to 3D laser scanning to Virtual Rreality (VR) reconstruction—creates space for sustained, repeated engagement. These reconstructions can be revisited indefinitely, analyzed from multiple angles, scrutinized at different scales, and experienced by multiple researchers sequentially or simultaneously. Critically, they enable engagement from different embodied positions. Someone who cannot physically stand in an excavation unit due to mobility disability, chronic fatigue, geographic distance, economic constraints, or visa restrictions can navigate a high-resolution 3D reconstruction with genuine archaeological rigor. A practitioner with processing differences may find that repeated, self-paced engagement allows for more sophisticated understanding than the real-time demands of fieldwork permit.

An immersive pillar centers on the idea that digital engagement could occur not only as post-field outreach or dissemination but also as a key stage in data gathering and analysis. Of course, these remote modes of engagement are only possible once the immersive data have been physically captured. Someone must be on-site to operate photogrammetry rigs, 3D scanners, or VR-ready cameras. Although investing time and resources for this first data-capturing moment may seem onerous, slowing down to do so also brings critical gains in terms of not only accessibility but also intellectual enrichment. This initial fieldwork moment shifts rather than eliminates the question of physical presence: not everyone needs to be everywhere, but thoughtful project design must still account for who carries the burden of on-site data creation and the priorities a project reveals when it fails to make that accounting.

Immersive technologies also require specific equipment (VR headsets, photogrammetry software, high-resolution 3D scanners) that imposes significant financial barriers. A basic VR headset costs $300–$500 USD; professional-grade photogrammetry software runs $3,500+ annually. For archaeologists in the Global South—descendant communities managing cultural heritage with limited support or early-career scholars without equipment budgets—these costs can be prohibitive. Open-source alternatives (Meshroom, VisualSFM) and open-access VR platforms (Mozilla Hubs, Spatial.io's free tier) reduce licensing costs. A second barrier is technical expertise (Oré Menendez 2025); equipment- and training-sharing across projects can offset this, but such arrangements typically depend on social networks that

are not equally open to all. Well-established and funded projects taking the lead in this sharing process would be undoubtedly impactful. Still, these costs reframe the immersive pillar not as a universally available solution but as one that must be implemented with deliberate attention to access.

This discussion is already being pursued by Indigenous communities and scholars. Realizing the vision of community ecosystems of practice (Supernant et al. 2020) requires confronting two entangled challenges: (1) the material inequalities that structure access to these technologies and (2) the question of sovereignty—that is, who controls immersive reconstructions of Indigenous and descendant community sites, and under whose terms they are stored, shared, and revoked. When photogrammetry and VR are designed with and for descendant communities rather than for academic circulation, they become instruments of heritage stewardship through which communities reclaim interpretive authority over their own past.

Pillar 4: Accessibility as Core Methodology

The final pillar reframes accessibility as a design principle from the outset, but precision matters here. "Accessibility" in this framework is not synonymous with Universal Design compliance, nor does it prescribe the full multimodal implementation that integrates haptic, visual, and audio components and falls within specialized fields such as human–computer interaction. Universal Design has produced important gains in adjacent fields (Vavik and Keitsch 2010). Still, critics have rightly noted its tendency toward being a reductive "problem-solving paradigm" that treats disability as a stable, universal category to be solved for rather than a socially situated and intersectional position (Imrie 2012). That logic risks reproducing precisely the accommodation model that crip theory challenges. Whereas Universal Design asks how existing systems can absorb more bodies, crip theory asks what we have to gain by instead redesigning the systems and critically facing what and who has been excluded. Hamraie and Fritsch (2019) show how crip technoscience reframes disability from a problem requiring accomodation to a source of expertise and innovation. Kafer's (2013) political/relational model of disability reinforces this: inaccessibility is a property of systems designed without accounting for human variation, not a property of individual bodies. The accessible pillar is therefore not a compliance standard but an epistemic orientation—a commitment to designing archaeological practice with the full range of practitioners in mind from the beginning and to recognizing the methodological innovations that marginalized practitioners have developed out of necessity. This also means that accessibility-centered design is not something done *for* marginalized practitioners but *with* them and, crucially, *by* them. Neurodivergent practitioners and disabled archaeologists are not passive beneficiaries of better design; they are its primary architects (Heath-Stout 2023).

In archaeological practice, this means moving past the institutional habit of separating physical accessibility checklists in laboratories from the harder question of fieldwork accessibility. Accessibility design should not only engage diverse embodiments, mobility devices, chronic pain, variable energy levels, and sensory differences but also build project timelines and communication structures that work for neurodivergent practitioners (Heath-Stout 2023). Sensory accessibility means multiple modes of experiencing archaeological material; temporal accessibility requires flexible scheduling, remote options, and distributed participation; economic accessibility demands ensuring that participation does not become cost prohibitive. Each addresses who can work within existing the archaeological field. But the deepest challenge is epistemic: ensuring that marginalized communities have access not only to the tools of archaeological practice but to the questions archaeology asks in the first place.

Integration: How the Pillars Work Together

The pillars are recursive. Slow methodology creates the temporal and cognitive space for digital literacy development; digital tools enable remote participation, which demands accessibility-centered design; immersive technologies make that participation genuinely meaningful for sophisticated analysis and collaborative interpretation; and accessibility principles ensure that all of this works for everyone. Several projects already operate within different aspects of this logic.

The Geospatial Platform for Andean Culture, History, and Archaeology (GeoPACHA) is a system that enables different teams of researchers to use machine learning to systematically audit high-resolution

satellite imagery and automatic detection results in 50,000 archaeological features across Andean landscapes—work that would require decades of traditional pedestrian survey alone (Wernke et al. 2023; Zimmer-Dauphinee et al. 2023). In the Andes, mobile GIS applications used during survey of Mawchu Llacta, a late Inca / early colonial site in the southern Peruvian Andes, enabled team members to record measurements, materials, and spatial relationships directly into structured digital forms feeding a shared project geodatabase (Wernke et al. 2016). This digital infrastructure enabled real-time collaboration among researchers across regions with varying landscape familiarity, materially reducing the geographic, physical, and economic barriers that have historically constrained access to the discipline (Daems 2020). At Huaca Colorada, a Late Moche ceremonial platform, Morrow and Wernke (2024) used photogrammetric documentation of stratigraphy to build a comprehensive 3D model database, which was analyzed collaboratively in Spatial.io. This virtual environment allowed comparison of stratigraphic relationships across excavation phases within a shared space, revealed depositional episodes that are difficult to perceive in traditional documentation, and facilitated real-time interpretive discussions that informed excavation strategy. Similar work at Mawchu Llacta used photogrammetry to capture architecture and stratigraphy across multiple units; through Spatial.io, distributed team members assessed preservation states and discussed excavation phases together, allowing those who could not be physically present to contribute meaningfully to interpretation (Wernke et al. 2016).

The Avebury Henge project has explored immersiveness and slowness together through virtual reconstructions that permit repeated, self-paced exploration. Participants who first explored the VR Neolithic monument reported heightened awareness of spatial relationships and architectural scale when they later visited in person (Falconer et al. 2020). Kyrlitsias et alia (2020) found that VR environments produced higher levels of user presence than desktop interfaces, suggesting that different immersive technologies serve different purposes rather than one simply being more effective than the other.

With respect to accessibility, the Field Methods in Indigenous Archaeology (FMIA) field school—a community-based research partnership between the University of Washington and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde—restructured its program to include virtual participation for students who could not travel to Oregon. Asynchronous discussion forums allowed thoughtful contributions from students who found real-time field conversation overwhelming due to social anxiety or language processing differences (Gonzalez and Edwards 2020). This parallels what Price (2011) identifies as "kairotic spaces"—the spontaneous, high-pressure interactions of academic life that privilege particular cognitive and communicative styles. Designing alternatives is not a concession but a better methodology. When the Sangro Valley Project (SVP) transitioned to digital recording, its database administrator built in multiple input modes (handwritten notes that converted to searchable text, voice recordings with transcription, direct digital entry) initially to accommodate a team member with dysgraphia (Motz 2016). Project directors found that this format flexibility improved documentation across the team: excavators who processed information verbally produced richer contextual descriptions via voice notes; those who preferred written reflection produced more systematic observations through structured forms. These examples illustrate a core principle of accessibility-centered design: when we design for the margins rather than retrofitting accommodations afterward, we generate innovations that benefit the entire community while expanding the range of contributors.

Implementation Guide

The case studies above are not exceptional outliers; they are proof. The framework I propose uses founding blocks that, in one way or another, are already operational in the discipline. What follows is a "cookbook" of suggestions that makes visible the decisions that could enable the outcomes we desire so that practitioners at different scales can replicate the logic instead of just the tools.

For Individual Practitioners

An audit of one's own workflows is a useful starting point—not to judge them but to identify where assumptions about physical presence, cognitive processing speed, or communication style are doing invisible work. Documenting these innovations matters: when practitioners develop workarounds for

their own constraints—neurodivergence, chronic illness, caregiving responsibilities, and economic limitations—they are generating methodological knowledge the discipline needs(Heath-Stout 2023). The SVP's multi-input documentation began precisely this way: a database administrator adapting a workflow for a team member with dysgraphia (Motz 2016), an adaptation that became a project-wide improvement. Reflection time built into a daily routine, even in small doses, pays off: 10 minutes of structured note-taking at the close of a field day transforms rushed data collection into meaningful interpretation.

For Project Directors and Principal Investigators

The most consequential decisions for accessibility happen at the planning stage. An accessibility audit of project design, conducted before finalizing it, surfaces the key questions: Can practitioners with mobility limitations contribute meaningfully to the analytical workflows? What about team members managing chronic conditions, neurodivergent processing styles, or caregiving responsibilities? What about researchers in contexts with restricted travel or limited equipment budgets? The GeoPACHA project's digital infrastructure enabled real-time remote participation for collaborators across regions, not as an accommodation but as a core feature of research design (Wernke et al. 2023). Multiple pathways for participation should be built into documentation and communication systems from the start: the SVP experience shows that format flexibility improves data quality across the whole team, not only for those who initially required it. The Grand Ronde field school's asynchronous virtual options produced contributions that, in the project team's assessment, exceeded those from in-person-only formats. Inclusive technologies should be budgeted for explicitly and categorized as methodology, not as supplemental accommodation. Flexible documentation systems, training time for digital tools, and extended timelines for reflection are not overhead; they are the conditions under which better research is produced. In grant applications, these costs should be framed accordingly: they belong in the core budget because they are core to the research design. Evaluating seasons for inclusion outcomes alongside research outcomes—who participated, what barriers emerged, what innovations the team developed in response—and publishing the lessons is itself a contribution to the discipline.

For Institutional Leaders

Institutions set the conditions within which practitioners and projects can or cannot implement what this framework describes. The most impactful change is also the most structurally resistant to make: revising how archaeological contributions are evaluated. Tenure and promotion criteria that equate fieldwork presence with rigor—or that undervalue computational, remote sensing, and digital heritage—directly reproduce the *Homo archaeologus* norm. As Dolmage (2017) demonstrates, these evaluation frameworks are not neutral measures of excellence; they are historically constructed systems that have encoded able-bodiedness and neurotypicality as preconditions for scholarly legitimacy. Revising them is not lowering the bar; it is recognizing that the bar was never a measure of impact but a checklist of productivity. Mentorship that actively models accessible practice (and that is recognized in professional evaluation) is equally essential, because the cultural transmission of the *Homo archaeologus* norm happens through mentorship. Consequently, its displacement must happen there too. Funding inclusive practices explicitly and providing professional development in accessible research design creates the material conditions for the framework to spread beyond the projects already implementing it.

Addressing Common Objections

Cost concerns warrant serious engagement. Technologies marketed as "democratizing" can concentrate power among well-resourced institutions (Kansa 2016; Sayre 2016). This is not a reason to reject digital methods; it is a reason to be deliberate about which tools we adopt, why, and for whom. But the deeper issue is that accessibility has historically been treated as optional rather than foundational. When accessibility appears expensive, it is typically because projects attempt to retrofit accommodations into designs that never considered diverse participation from the outset. Many effective innovations require minimal investment: structured reflection time costs nothing beyond intentional scheduling, facilitation scripts demand only preparation, and format flexibility leverages existing technology.

The current funding landscape adds a layer of complexity that warrants honest engagement. Shifting priorities have made it more difficult to secure resources explicitly designated for accessibility initiatives. This does not render accessibility financially unachievable; it demands a reframing of how these costs are categorized. Flexible documentation, inclusive communication protocols, and training in digital tools are methodological investments whose returns are measured in data quality, team retention, and epistemic breadth. The same logic applies globally, though unevenly. For archaeologists in the Global South, early career scholars without established infrastructure, and projects without federal or institutional safety nets, these solutions are inaccessible in precisely the ways this framework seeks to address. The honest acknowledgment is that innovations emerging first in privileged spaces are not therefore invalid. What matters is whether the discipline creates conditions for their broader adoption or allows access barriers to consolidate them as elite practice.

A related objection concerns the time required to develop expertise in digital methods. The concern is legitimate, but it misreads what is actually happening: time is not added; it is redirected. Practitioners who participate differently in compressed field seasons—whether due to disability, caregiving, geography, or economics—are already investing that time elsewhere. They reinvest it. The expertise required to conduct remote-sensing analysis, manage collaborative platforms, or develop photogrammetric workflows is not acquired passively; it demands sustained investment. Digital proficiency developed under these conditions is not a workaround for field absence; it is a parallel and equally rigorous form of archaeological labor.

Finally, appeals to "traditional methods" as inherently superior warrant scrutiny. These methods have been proven effective for the practitioners who could access them. Still, that observation misses the epistemological point: when we limit legitimate practice to methods requiring particular bodily configurations, cognitive styles, and life circumstances, we constrain not only who can participate but what the discipline can know (Voss 2021). The concern that accessibility-centered design requires "extra work" similarly reflects a misunderstanding about where effort is invested. Inclusive practice front-loads effort during planning, but that upfront investment reduces friction during implementation. Projects designed for diverse participation from the outset encounter fewer mid-project crises than those that scramble to retrofit accommodations after barriers emerge.

Conclusion: The Archaeological Practice We Can Build

After completing my doctoral dissertation, I was fortunate to be hired into a tenure-track position. Once I arrived, I invested considerable time in redoing my office during the weekends: I added removable wallpaper to walls and cabinets, put together my coffee and tea sets (which let me offer a warm drink to students during office hours), and added indirect lighting to manage the atmosphere in which I concentrate best. My institution provided a fidgeting chair and an electric standing desk (Figures 1 and 2). I would once have considered these steps superfluous. I now recognize that the benefit of this investment, personal and institutional, was critical to my ability to be the scholar I was hired to be. Redoing my office reflects the key point of this article: accessibility is creating welcoming spaces from the outset, and doing so is not accommodation. It is methodology.

The *Homo archaeologu*s, with its assumptions about physical presence, able-bodiedness, neurotypicality, and conformity to dominant identity norms, has shaped archaeology in ways that limit both who can practice and what the discipline can know. The four-pillar framework of slow, digital, immersive, and accessible practices offers a practical pathway for transforming archaeological work from a discipline that systematically excludes to one that generates innovation through inclusion. Applied through crip theory, this framework illuminates what exclusion has obscured: marginalized practitioners have been developing innovative methodologies all along—strategies for navigating constraints that produce a more reflective, rigorous, and ethical archaeology. A slow, digital, immersive, and accessible archaeology systematizes these innovations and makes them visible as contributions worthy of recognition and replication. This is not about lowering standards; it is about recognizing that our current standards have been narrower than we acknowledged, and that expanding them strengthens rather than weakens archaeological knowledge production.



Figure 1. Photo of my office at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) campus, showing indirect lighting, a fidgeting chair, and a sitting and standing desk. Accommodations provided by the Office of Accessibility resources and the Department of Anthropology (photograph courtesy of Gabriela Oré Menéndez).



Figure 2. Photo of my laboratory at the UNLV campus—the Digital Cartographies and Geospatial Analysis Laboratory (DCGeoLab)—with indirect lighting and an electric standing desk, which offers a calming atmosphere not only for me but for students too (photograph courtesy of Gabriela Oré Menéndez).

What remains is collective action. Individual practitioners can audit their workflows and document their innovations. Project directors can design for diverse participation from the outset. Institutions can revise policies and recognize the methodological contributions that challenge traditional hierarchies. None of this requires waiting for permission. The question is not whether archaeology can become more inclusive. It is whether we choose to build the discipline that inclusion makes possible.

Acknowledgments. This article would not have been possible without the emotional support and care of many people. First and foremost, I want to thank Chelsea F. Blackmore for helping me find my (archaeologist) voice and for always providing support and the security of belonging to a community and chosen family—a foundation that made me feel comfortable enough to write this. I am deeply grateful to Carla Hernández Garavito for serving as my reviewer, editor, and source of emotional and logistical support throughout this process. I also extend my gratitude to the Department of Anthropology at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, for its institutional support and for providing me with the space and time necessary to complete this work. Throughout this process, I have engaged with different AI tools. I used Consensus to expand bibliographical research and find new sources to read and broaden my argument. Claude AI was used as a partner to systematize "brainstorming" sessions and identify the key points of my ideas to make sure the text had a clear structure. Finally, Grammarly Pro was used at the end of the process to improve readability.

Funding Statement. No funding was acquired for this project.

Data Availability Statement. The data presented in this research are in published works; no original or unpublished data were used in the preparation of this article.

Competing Interests. The author declares that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

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Cite this article: Oré Menéndez, Gabriela. 2026. Slow, Digital, Immersive, Accessible: A Crip Studies–Centered Framework for Inclusive Archaeological Practice. *Advances in Archaeological Practice.* https://doi.org/10.1017/aap.2026.10180.