

**Key recommendations for virtual meetings**

**Purpose and background:** The Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities has provided a quick checklist with key recommendations for UN staff to make virtual meetings accessible for all participants with disabilities. The Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities gathered the following information from representative organizations of persons with disabilities, in particular from the International Disability Alliance and its members, and from additional research. For further information, please contact Dr. Elizabeth Lockwood at elizabeth.lockwood@cbm-global.org

**Recommendations**

The first step is to choose a platform that supports accessibility for all persons with disabilities. For details, refer to [Overview on Accessibility of Video Conferencing Apps and Services](http://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/accessibility-sgpwd). Below are key recommendations to consider prior, during and after a virtual meeting. Please note that recommendations are not listed in any order of priority.

**Prior to the meeting:**

* Add a section for participants to indicate any accessibility requirements in advertisements and registration forms well ahead of time.
* Establish if someone has a support person, ensure that you have the support person’s contact information and copy them into all communications.
* Make sure any planning emails are easy to understand with clear information about dates, times and other information.
* Provide the contact information, including an email address and a phone number of a person in charge of accommodations on all event notices.
* Book a professional and accredited sign language interpreter (International Sign or the local sign language as relevant) well ahead of time. If the meeting lasts more than one hour, two sign language interpreters should be hired.
* Book a real-time captioning service well ahead of time.
* Provide at least two methods to join the meeting, such as a dial-in number along with the link to the virtual meeting.
* Design and share an accessible meeting agenda with expected outcomes ahead of the meeting. Make sure the agenda and any papers are shared with time for a person to review with a supporter if needed.
* Build into the agenda time for breaks and opportunities to ask questions.
* Share accessible presentation materials with participants, sign language interpreters and captioner ahead of the meeting. The materials should include any complex terminology and words being used during the presentation.
* Carry out audio/video/visual checks with IT staff, facilitators, presenters, captioner, and sign language interpreters prior to the webinar. Allow sufficient time to work out the technical details.
* Offer a pre-meeting with the chair of the meeting for participants to go over the agenda and to ask any questions.
* Establish well-defined roles to manage the meeting (e.g., chair, turn-taking manager, and/or notetaker).
* Offer a time to have a test run so people can practice using the platform if they have not used it before.
* Run Ethernet cables instead of WiFi, if at all possible, to reduce video freezes and glitches.

**During the meeting:**

* Share what accessible services are being provided and how to access the services when the meeting begins.
* Establish rules for participation at the beginning of the meeting, including how to manage taking turns to participate.
* Give participants a way of asking speakers to go more slowly or to explain a point.
* Remind speakers and participants to avoid jargon and acronyms and to speak in a clear concise way using easy-to-understand, plain language.
* Inform everyone that only one person should speak at a time and that all individuals should mute themselves when they are not speaking.
* Participants should say their names prior to each time speaking, to include blind people and those who have low vision. This also helps captioners and sign language interpreters.
* Be aware that the raise-hand function does not consistently work for screen readers. As an alternative, a participant who would like to speak can unmute themselves and say their name and then wait for the host to give them the floor.
* Provide the link for captioning to participants prior to the meeting, as well as in the chat box in the beginning of the meeting.
* Provide captions on the same window as used for speakers and PowerPoint presentations so that the user does not need to go back and forth between different windows.
* Use a separate link or window for captions to avoid audio interfering with those using screen readers.
* Utilize a well-functioning headset, webcam, microphone with good lighting and strong internet connection when possible.
* Choose a notetaker for meetings to provide notes to participants afterward. Also, captioning transcripts can be requested and shared later.
* The facilitator should periodically read out the comments and questions in the chat box to include those who are using screen readers.
* Be aware that there will be a slight delay in sign language interpretation, captioning, and a much longer delay for interpretation for persons with deafblindness.
* Provide additional time for persons with disabilities to respond.
* In larger meetings, default to video off except for chairs, interpreters, turn-taking manager, and people who have the floor, which is helpful for deaf and hard of hearing participants.

**Tips for creating inclusive presentations:**

* When designing a PowerPoint or other visual presentations, each slide should have a title and use plain language[[1]](#endnote-1) in a large Sans Serif font with no more than six lines of text per slide. The minimum font size should be 24-pt or larger.
* Use photos or images to help explain key points.
* Do not use acronyms or jargon.
* Use examples to explain difficult-to-understand concepts.
* Avoid using tables or graphs as much as possible.
* Avoid using more than two different fonts, and do not use italics or all caps, but instead bold for emphasis.
* Add good contrast between the text and slide background so that people with low vision can read the slide.
* Avoid using only color coding for conveying or distinguishing information.
* When using audiovisual media, provide captions for all audio content, including sounds.
* Provide a text alternative for all non-text elements that convey information
* For persons with deafblindness, consider including descriptions of sounds and images on a separate platform.
* When using audiovisual media, provide captions or alternative formats for all audio content, including sounds. For persons with deafblindness, this may include descriptions of sounds and images.

**Tips for presenters to be inclusive:**

* Speak naturally and at a regular pace.
* Check that the captioner and sign language interpreters are able to hear you well for transcription and interpretation.
* Explain and describe graphics and pictures for blind people and those who have low vision.
* Avoid jargon, idioms, and acronyms. Speakers should refer to the full name of an entity and not assume knowledge of abbreviations.

**After the meeting:**

* Share the notes or captioning transcripts with participants.
* If relevant share a clear list of actions with attached names and time frames.
* Post presentations and the meeting recording online.
* Reach out to participants to get feedback on accessibility features.

**References**

Deaf/Hard of Hearing Technology Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center (2020) *Accessibility Tips for a Better Zoom/Virtual Meeting Experience*. Retrieved from <https://www.deafhhtech.org/rerc/accessible-virtual-meeting-tips/>

Digital.gov (n.d.) *Using Section 508 Guidance to Improve the Accessibility of Government Services*. Retrieved from [https://digital.gov/2015/06/05/using-section-508-guidance-to-improve-the-accessibility-of-government-services/ - Etiquette](https://digital.gov/2015/06/05/using-section-508-guidance-to-improve-the-accessibility-of-government-services/#Etiquette)

NYC Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities (2020) *Accessible virtual meetings guide*. Retrieved from <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/mopd/downloads/pdf/virtual-meetings-accessibility-guide.pdf>

UNICEF (2020) Inclusive remote meetings

1. Plain languageis clear, straightforward expression, using only as many words as are necessary. For example, put information in logical order with the important details first and use active voice. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)