

3 Planning for Accessible Meetings

In order to build relationships, establish partnerships, or increase equitable experiences, disability inclusion and accessibility need to be integrated into planning and procedures. Accessible meetings create a mutually respectful environment, and allow all participants to contribute, enhancing the meeting experience and outcomes. Using universal accessibility accommodations and design as standard practice for all meeting planning is the best way to ensure that your agency can provide accessible meetings when inviting new or existing partners. This applies to internal, external, face-to-face and virtual meetings.

This workbook addresses some of the overarching considerations and activities to accessible meetings that apply to before, during and after meetings. For a detailed review of physical accessibility to make a meeting accessible, please refer to the Facility Accessibility Quick-Check Tool in Workbook #6.

Outreach and Recruitment

Provide effective communication when announcing the meeting and publishing meeting details. Accessible and inclusive public information about the meeting shows agency competence, and respect for potential partners. Effective communication provides a first impression that will allow organizations to know what to expect. It sets the stage for a relationship and partnership founded in mutual respect and a shared desire for sustainable community change. Some methods of ensuring effective communication include:

- Publicize information about the meeting in accessible and redundant locations and formats.

- Provide meeting attendance instructions in plain, simple-to-read language. Provide these instructions when the attendee signs up, not later.
- Publicize the meeting's purpose, expected outcomes, target audience, and sponsoring organizations.
- Clearly state that accommodations will be provided for individuals with disabilities.

Providing Accommodations for Meeting Attendees

It's important to provide clear instructions on how to request and obtain accommodations during meetings. Establishing a standardized process with designated roles and responsibilities makes the whole process easier for the attendee/requestor and the meeting host/convener.

- Identify a timeframe or deadline for requesting accommodations.
- Identify vendors who provide accommodations, including those not already under agreement with your organization.
- Use standard language to notify the public about the accommodation request process.
- Communicate with the person who requests the accommodation about the best accommodation available.

Virtual Accessibility

Meetings may be held in person or virtually. In addition to overarching accessibility measures, there are specific considerations for online meetings.

1. Use the agreed-upon means to signal that you want to say something, such as raising your actual or virtual hand. The person who leads the meeting will individually call on participants to speak.
2. Say your name first before stating your contribution.
3. Let the other participants know when you are done speaking by saying, for example, "Okay, I'm done."
4. Slow down to accommodate the delay from the captioner's text.
5. Help remind fast talkers to slow down with gently saying "slower, please." You may also use the ASL sign as an additional visual prompt (the sign and a verbal description are shown below)
6. Help remind all by gently saying, "one at a time, thanks." (These phrases do add more noise but help reduce chaos.)
7. Ask everyone if they like to be called on or not or consider a speaking order.
8. Mute your microphone when you are not speaking to reduce interference from background noise. In some instances, the host may mute participants to assist in reducing background noise.
9. Be patient and courteous while others are speaking and abstain from making any facial expressions that could be perceived as being hurtful.
10. Include the link for the CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) captions or code in the invite and/or on the meeting agenda.

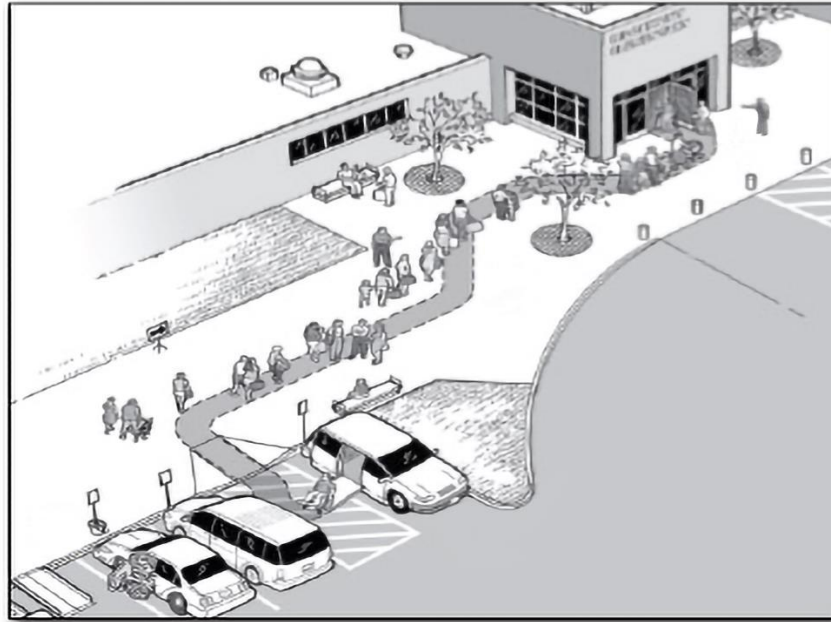
11. Try to send out the meeting agenda on the day before the meeting, if possible, so participants have adequate time to prepare.
12. Turn on your video so that your colleagues may use facial expressions to better understand the context of your message.
13. Use a background image or blur your background to minimize distractions.
14. Use PowerPoint Live when presenting so that participants can use subtitles, use screen readers, high contrast mode, and move at their own pace.

ASL sign for “please slow down”

Signing: We sign slowly by placing our non-dominant arm in front of us with palm down, and then moving our dominant hand slowly and gently from the tip of our non-dominant hand all the way to the bend of our arm. The image below shows a woman signing “slow.”



Location Accessibility



Facilities should meet ADA accessibility requirements. Conduct a walkthrough of the facility before selecting a meeting location to ensure accessibility. Since environments can change between the initial walkthrough and the day of meeting, perform a follow-up accessibility assessment immediately before the meeting starts. Common barriers to successful walkthroughs include:

- Confirm designated accessible parking, sidewalks, and curb cuts.
- Ensure an accessible entrance to building that is clearly marked.
- Confirm access to all service areas, including an accessible elevator, ramp, exterior paths, etc., depending on building and operation.
- Verify adequate accessible restrooms.
- Ensure or post accessible signage to ensure wayfinding.
- Verify audio and visual supplies and equipment are available to ensure accessible communication.

- In addition to these overarching considerations, there are many specific areas to assess for accessibility. Please use **Workbook #6 Facility Accessibility Quick Check** in advance of scheduling a meeting.

Effective Communication



Plan to provide effective communication during and after the meeting:

- Post accessible signage in and around meeting location.
- Ensure presenters provide accessible and redundant formats and use a microphone.
- Provide a communication accommodation, such as an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter, as requested.
- Use open or closed captioning for any video presentation.

Provide accessible and redundant formats for the following:

- Meeting sign-in and sign-out process
- Electronic meeting materials
- Handouts
- In-group discussion and notetaking

Tips for Information Gathering and Brainstorming Strategies

Do not rely on one method to collect information, problem solve, or discuss new ideas with meeting attendees, such as writing on large flip charts. Not all people have the same preferences for receiving, analyzing, and providing information. Providing multiple opportunities through multiple methods (i.e., writing, electronic, verbal) accommodates the learning styles and abilities of all meeting attendees and ensures they can contribute to their maximum ability.

Planning Considerations

Accessibility does not end with ensuring an ASL interpreter and room layout, but also includes a focus on meeting activities and processes:

- Review effective communication and accessibility standards with third party presenters.
- If serving food, address considerations relevant to food allergies, dietary restrictions, accessible food information labelling, accessible layout, and accessible feeding services.
- Develop or revise safety protocols that account for the effective notification and safe evacuation or shelter-in-place of people with disabilities.
- Plan to engage people with disabilities in meeting discussion, which includes effective and respectful communication, and people-first language.
- Plan to develop and distribute accessible meeting materials, including meeting minutes or notes, reference or status reports, and presentation materials before or after all meetings.

Tips for Rearranging the Room for Group Activities

If meeting attendees rearrange chairs and tables for group work, make sure there are accessible paths of travel. Do not forget to consider how rearranging the room can impact the location of communication accommodations, such as where an interpreter stands or where closed captions are posted.

Post-Meeting Engagement

Make sure that your post-meeting communication is accessible and inclusive of those with disabilities. This includes meeting materials, the method of sharing information, and scheduling future meetings.

- Create accessible (e.g., plain text) versions of meeting minutes, presentations, progress reports, memos, etc., and post in an accessible manner.
- Ensure survey platforms are accessible to people with disabilities. Accommodate individuals as necessary to ensure their feedback is equitably considered when scheduling the next meeting.
- The platforms used to share workgroup or task force progress should be accessible to people with disabilities. Processes for collecting information from and sharing information with group members should be accessible to all members.

Planning for Accessible Meetings

Three top challenges (examples: meeting locations are not accessible, too few ASL interpreters):

Three Top Challenges To Accessibility	How to Address The Challenges
Challenge 1	Solution 1
Challenge 2	Solution 2
Challenge 3	Solution 3

CDC Statement

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