How to Host an Inclusive Virtual Listening Session

This content was compiled by our collaborators at the Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology (PEAT).

Select an Accessible Platform

Before you schedule your Listening Session, evaluate the accessibility features of the event platform you already use or select a new one that meets your needs. Any platform you are considering should clearly describe its accessibility features. When evaluating options, consider applicable legal requirements and consult the following list of 4 elements to make sure your platform is accessible.

Prepare for the Session

- When sending the invitation, encourage participants to let you know if they have any accommodation requests or other requirements to engage effectively.

Sample message:

"We strive to host an inclusive and accessible event. Accessible materials will be distributed to participants in advance, and live captioning will be provided during the event. If you have questions about the accessibility of this session or want to request accommodations, please reach out to [add name] at [add email] by [date that allows you enough time to fulfill the request before the session]."

- Engage a live captioner to provide Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) service. Captions help a wide range of people with disabilities, from hearing loss to ADHD. A CART provider is generally preferable to artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled captions for the purpose of ensuring accuracy.
    - If you are using a captioner for the first time, schedule a test run.
    - Share background materials with the captioner and any interpreters in advance so they will be familiar with the content.
- Make necessary arrangements for any other requested accommodations, such as American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation (note that captions are not equivalent to ASL interpretation).
    - Learn more about captioning and ASL interpretation for virtual events.
- Hold a dry run for the session with speakers and others in designated roles, such as the chat monitor and event facilitator.
- Train speakers on how to use the platform and verbally convey content to maximize accessibility.
- Create and distribute accessible documents for your event in advance (slides, agendas). Include day-of contact information for someone that people can quickly reach if they have difficulty joining the event. Resources to help get started include:
    - Making Events Accessible
    - PowerPoint Accessibility
    - Best Practices for Making Word Documents Accessible
    - W3C Multimedia Accessibility FAQ
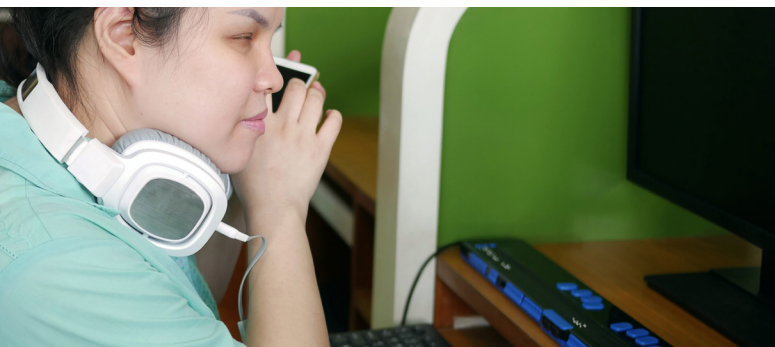
During the Session

- Open the event 30 minutes early and ensure the platform is working properly.

- Confirm that the captioner is present and captioning is working.

- If there is a sign language interpreter, make sure to spotlight their video so it is always visible.

- If you are recording the session, let participants know at the beginning.

- Connect with the audience at the start of the event by providing clear instructions for engagement, including the process for accessibility troubleshooting and needs (for example, during Q&A, anyone speaking should start by saying their name for the captioner).

- Be mindful of sensory access needs and how it may impact participation. Be prepared to address this as necessary. For example, depending on how long the session is, build in time for breaks so participants will not miss important content if they need a moment away.

- Keep track of time and keep all participants engaged.
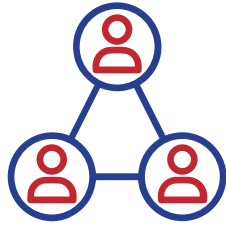
After the Session

- After the event, thank attendees and share materials as appropriate (notes, transcript, recording, links, resources) in an accessible format.

- Collect feedback from participants on the content and their experience related to the accessibility of your event.

Learn More

- Create Accessible Meetings - Section508.gov

- Telework and Accessibility - PEATworks

- Accessibility features for commonly used platforms:

  - Adobe Connect
  - Google Workspace
  - Microsoft Teams
  - Slack (keyboard accessibility, screen reader accessibility)
  - WebEx
  - Zoom

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