



Accessible Virtual Meetings Guide

November 2021

This guide is meant to provide information on how you can make your virtual meetings accessible to people with disabilities. It includes information on:

- How to choose an accessible virtual conferencing platform
- Promoting with accessibility in mind
- What you should do before the meeting
- Providing accommodations and hiring access professionals
- How to run your meeting with accessibility in mind

Table of Contents

Prep Work	2
Choosing A Platform	2
Providing Reasonable Accommodations	4
Advertising Your Virtual Meetings	7
Join Meeting Info.....	7
Accessibility Information in your Advertisements	7
Preparing Tech and Panelists	8
Tech and Access Setup.....	9
Expectations of Presenters.....	10
Online Disability Etiquette	11
Access Check	12
Establish the Ways to Participate	13
Describe Images and Videos	14
Plain Language	15
Additional Resources	16
Virtual Platform Accessibility Resources	16
Reasonable Accommodation Resources	17
Additional Guides	17

Prep Work

As you plan your virtual meeting, you should consider the following:

- Choosing an accessible platform
- Setting up accommodations
- Making your materials and advertising accessible

Choosing A Platform

It is important to choose a platform that supports accessibility for people that have intellectual, developmental, mobility, vision, or hearing disabilities. For example, a lot of blind people use assistive technologies such as screen readers to access the content on their devices. Some folks with mobility disabilities use the keyboard instead of the mouse. Not all platforms support screen reader or keyboard accessibility. Below is a list of popular platforms and their accessibility features.

Note: The City of New York does not endorse any of these products. The information presented below is gathered from the product websites or from feedback from the disability community.

Zoom Meetings and Webinars

The following features are supported by the Zoom conferencing platform.

- Support for screen readers
- Support for manual and automated captions
- Supports video and spotlight features for ASL interpretation
- Supports keyboard shortcuts
- Supports Multiple audio channels for language translation and Audio Description
- Supports participation features such as raise hand, chat, Polls, and Q&A

For more information, visit the [Zoom Accessibility page](#).

Google Meet

The following features are supported by the Google Meet platform.

- Support for screen readers
- Supports live automated captions (Note: if the meeting is recorded, the captions will not be included as part of the recording)
- Supports video and spotlight features for ASL interpretation
- Has keyboard shortcuts
- Has participation features

For more information, visit the [Google Meet Accessibility page](#).

Microsoft Teams

The following features are supported by the Microsoft Teams platform.

- Support for screen readers
- Supports live automated captions
- Supports video and spotlight features for ASL interpretation
- Has keyboard shortcuts
- Supports participation features

For more information, visit the [Microsoft Teams Accessibility page](#).

Platforms with Known Accessibility Barriers

The following meeting platforms have had a history of accessibility barriers including lack of screen reader accessibility and keyboard shortcuts. In most cases, screen reader users will not be able to independently join the meeting.

- [Cisco WebEx](#)
- [GoTo Meetings](#)

Providing Reasonable Accommodations

It is a legal requirement to provide reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities upon request. Some accommodations you might be asked for include, but are not limited to:

- American Sign Language (ASL) Interpretation
- Live Captioning
- Audio Description for videos and performances
- Documents in accessible and/or alternate formats

ASL Interpretation

If someone requests American Sign Language interpretation (ASL), you can hire an ASL interpreter to join the meeting who can provide sign language interpretation through the video conferencing platform.

When using Zoom Meetings, attendees can pin the screen of the interpreter so that they can always see the interpreter. Be sure to give instructions on how to pin a participant's video at the beginning of the meeting or event.

[Learn how to pin the screen of a participant \(Zoom\).](#)

When using Zoom Webinar, be sure to spotlight the interpreter so that attendees can always see them. Only one person should be spotlighted at a time. Since the Host controls what Attendees see, the Host should set the Attendees view to Gallery or Side-by-Side Gallery when screen sharing.

[Learn how to use the spotlight feature \(Zoom\).](#)

Please note that interpreting is a physically demanding profession. For this reason, meetings longer than 1 hour will require 2 interpreters and they will switch off every 15-20 minutes. MOPD's list of [American Sign Language Interpretation Services \(MOPD Website\)](#).

Captioning

Captioning is used to include people with hearing disabilities in your virtual meetings. Depending on the platform, you may have the capability for a captioning professional to provide manual live captions or use automated

live captions. Both methods have pros and cons in terms of cost and efficacy. MOPD's [List of NYC Captioning Providers \(MOPD Website\)](#).

Setting up Captions

In this section, there are tips on using captioning features for each virtual conferencing platform.

Zoom Captions and Live Transcript

As mentioned before, Zoom supports both manual Captions and an automated Live Transcript. Manual Captions are the most accurate and can be saved as a transcript for meetings. The Live Transcription feature can be useful in an emergency. However, it is known for making mistakes that can hinder the user's ability to understand the meeting. Both features will be included if the meeting is recorded.

While manual Captions are better, they do have a cost and some extra setup. You will need to hire a captioner and assign them to type captions for that meeting. You also have to make sure that [captions are turned on in the Zoom Portal](#) before starting the meeting.

Note, while the Live Transcription feature is included with a Zoom license, it is often inaccurate. It is always preferred to hire a captioner. [Enabling closed caption and transcription services on Zoom](#).

Google Meet Live Captions

Google Meet only supports automated captions. While this feature is free for all users, it has some limitations. Its accuracy varies and captions are not saved if you record the meeting. The feature can be useful in an emergency. [Enabling captions on Google Meet](#).

Microsoft Teams Live Captions

Microsoft Teams supports live automated captions. The feature is free to use and easy to activate. Individual users can turn on automated captions during the meeting and the host can turn on captions for all users. If the meeting is recorded, the captions are included with the video as well as a transcript.

There is currently no support for manual captions. However, the feature will be available in the future.

Just like all automated captions, accuracy can vary, and it is recommended to hire captioners to provide manual captions whenever possible. [Enabling Live captions in Microsoft Teams](#).

Audio Description

For attendees that are blind or have low vision, Audio Description is a way of making visual information accessible to them. Audio Description is a live or recorded voice track that explains visual aspects of videos for blind audiences. Examples include reading text on screen, setting up the scene, introducing characters and describing important visual events.

Audio Description is recommended for virtual events that have an artistic performance or film screening aspect to them. Zoom's [language interpretation feature](#) can be used to allow up to 20 participants to provide language translation.

Setup Audio Description on Zoom

To setup Audio Description for your event, you need to hire an audio describer first. Then you can add a language with the label Audio Description and assign the audio describer to that channel. Once users join your meeting, they would go to the language interpretation section and choose the Audio Description channel. Links with more guidance are below.

- [Setup Language Translation Services \(Zoom\)](#)
- [List of Audio Description Services \(MOPD Website\)](#)

Documents in Accessible Formats

If you are sharing electronic documents or slide decks during your virtual meeting, you should make them accessible to attendees with disabilities. Also, if you are promoting your meeting on social media, your posts should be accessible. Below are links to guides for several mediums.

- [Accessible Documents Guide \(General\)](#)
- [Creating Accessible PDFs Using Adobe InDesign](#)
- [Accessible Slide Decks Guide](#)
- [Accessible Social Media Guide](#)
- [Audio Description and Captions Guide](#)

Advertising Your Virtual Meetings

There are a lot of details that are useful to include in your advertisements, in this section, we will highlight information that you should include in all your advertisements. When creating promotional materials be sure to include:

- At least two methods to join your meeting
- Accessibility information

Join Meeting Info

Including a link to your meeting is convenient for those who can join using their computer or smart device. However, it is important to remember that some individuals may not have easy access to the Internet. In your advertisements and calendar events, always include a dial-in number along with the link to your virtual meeting.

Accessibility Information in your Advertisements

For NYC agencies, including accessibility language in advertisements for public events is required by [Local Law 28 of 2016](#). While it is not legally required for nonprofits, museums, private businesses, and community organizations, we highly recommend that you include access language in your advertisements for your meetings or events. It is a way of specifically inviting the disability community. It also gives people with disabilities a way to request accommodations. Include the following information in your advertisements:

- Info about the accessibility of the platform you are using
- Any accessibility features, such as the accessibility of the platform you are using or accommodations that are being provided (e.g. such as ASL interpretation)
- A point of contact to request accommodations including both a phone number and email address
- A deadline to request accommodations, typically 72 hours before the meeting

Accessibility Language Example

Below is an example of accessibility language that you can include in your advertisement.

This virtual event will be held on Zoom Meetings which is accessible to attendees with disabilities. Automated live captions will be available by default. To request accommodations such as American Sign Language interpretation, live human captions, audio description or materials in an accessible format, you may reach out to [Name of Person] at [Phone Number] or [Email Address] no later than [Insert date that is at least 72 hours before your event].

For more information and examples of accessibility language, refer to the [MOPD Meeting Guide](#).

Preparing Tech and Panelists

In the final stages of planning your meeting, you should do the following to cut down on technical difficulties and troubleshooting during your event.

- Test technology and accessibility services
- Make sure presenters know what is expected of them

Tech and Access Setup

It is always a good idea to do test runs of your meeting before the actual date of the event. It is advised to do this tech check at least a few days before your event.

Invite your presenters, access professionals, and one person to act as an attendee.

Make sure that all presenters, cohosts, and access professionals have downloaded any software they need to participate and are familiar with using the virtual conferencing platform you have chosen.

Get familiar with host controls and accessibility features. Be sure to know how to:

- How to assign hosts and cohosts.
- How to turn on live transcripts, assign a captioner and that you know the difference between the two features.
- How to change the font size of captions.
- How to use the pin video and spotlight features to make sure the video of presenters and ASL interpreters are always present.
- How to setup and use the Language Interpretation feature.
- How to mute, turn video on, raise hands and the keyboard shortcuts for each.
- How to use the chat and Q&A features.
- How to share screen and audio.

Below are links with references to keyboard shortcuts and getting started guides.

- [Keyboard Shortcuts in Zoom](#)
- [Getting Started with Zoom](#)
- [How to Use Zoom with NVDA](#)
- [Keyboard Shortcuts in Google Meet](#)

- [How to Use Google Meet](#)
- [How to Use Google Meet with a Screen reader](#)
- [Keyboard Shortcuts in Microsoft Teams](#)
- [Get Started with Microsoft Teams](#)
- [Basic Tasks Using a Screen Reader with Microsoft Teams](#)

Expectations of Presenters

It is important to let your presenters know about their responsibilities regarding accessibility. Be sure to communicate the following to anyone who will be presenting at your event.

Image Descriptions for Presenters

When introducing yourself describe what you look like for the benefit of blind audiences. Some attributes you can include are:

- General age, such as mid-thirties.
- Skin color, race, or ethnicity—such as white, black, middle eastern, or Jewish.
- Your gender identity, such as Cis female, trans male, non-binary, etc.
- Hairstyle and color, such as “I have long dark curly hair that I have tied up in a ponytail.”
- Eye color, such as brown, blue, or green.
- Attire, such as “I’m wearing a white button-up long sleeve shirt with blue checkers.”
- Background, such as “I am in my living room sitting on a dark blue couch with a wall behind me.”

Feel free to include as many or as little of these in your image description.

Here is an example of a full image description:

I am a middle eastern man in my mid-thirties. I have brownish, hazelish eyes, and long dark curly hair that I have tied up in a ponytail. I am wearing a green sweater and am sitting on a dark blue couch in my living room. Behind me is a wall with a tactile painting on it.

Describing Slides for Presenters

If you are going to use slides or share materials, it is your responsibility to make them accessible. When using slides, be sure to describe the following:

- Describe the general slide layout at the beginning of your presentation
- Read the slide title whenever advancing to a new slide
- Describe any important images on the slide before discussing the content of the slide

There are many guides on [nyc.gov/accessibilityguides](https://www.nyc.gov/accessibilityguides) to help with making slides, documents, and other digital content accessible.

Disability Etiquette for Presenters

To ensure the best communication, make sure your presenters are aware of the following rules.

- Every time you speak, state your name and affiliation.
- Only one person should speak at a time. This benefits interpreters and participants with disabilities.
- Speak at a normal speed and take short breaks (30-60 seconds) so that interpreters and captioners can switch off and keep up with the presentation.

Online Disability Etiquette

Now that you have made your meeting accessible, hired access professionals, conducted tech checks, and informed presenters of their responsibilities, it is time to run your meeting with accessibility in mind.

When hosting a virtual meeting, use these guidelines to make it easier for attendees with disabilities to follow along and participate.

- Start with an access check
- Establish the ways in which attendees can participate and request assistance
- Describe all images and videos
- Use plain language

Access Check

It is a common practice within the disability community to start every meeting with an access check. It is a way of checking in with your attendees as well as sharing valuable information about accessibility features of your event. Include the following in your access check when hosting a virtual meeting.

Volume and Speed

Start by asking your attendees the following:

- Am I speaking loud enough?
- Am I speaking too fast?

This will give you a good idea of what speed and volume you will need to have for the rest of the meeting.

Announce Accessibility Features

You have put a lot of work into making your virtual meeting accessible. It can go by unnoticed if you do not let attendees know what is available. If you have ASL interpreters, live captioning, or documents in accessible formats, announce these features during your access check. Also, let all attendees know how to access these services, including how to turn on closed captions, how to pin the video of an interpreter, and how to access the language interpretation feature, if available.

If you have made your documents and slides accessible, email them to attendees before the meeting. You should also have them downloadable on a webpage online. Some website addresses can be long and difficult to type, you can create a short URL using bit.ly or [Tiny URL](https://tinyurl.com) so that it's easier to get to the page where your documents can be downloaded.

Establish the Ways to Participate

It can be overwhelming to be in a meeting with five or more people. For that reason, it is good to establish the ways in which attendees can participate and request assistance. In your access check, be sure to include any or all the suggestions below.

Microphone Etiquette

When we leave our microphones on, it also shares our background sounds with other attendees. This could be the sound of radiators, other people in the background, pets, etc. In a meeting of 3 or more people, it can get difficult to hear one person if everyone's microphone is on. This is especially important to ensure accurate ASL interpretation and captions. Establish a rule that all participants should have their microphones off or muted when they are not speaking. You should also let all attendees know how to mute and unmute before starting the meeting as because some folks might be new to the platform you are using.

One Person at a Time

Captioners and interpreters can only caption or interpret for one person at a time. Establish a rule for all participants that only one person should speak at a time and to state your name and affiliation before you speak.

Attendee Participation

You should establish a way for attendees to get your attention and participate in the meeting. In your access check, let your attendees know how to participate and get your attention. Below are a few ways on how folks can participate:

- **Announce yourself:** Let attendees know that they can unmute themselves and say their name. Then wait for the host to give them the floor.
- **Use the chat feature:** Let attendees know that they can submit their questions in the chat area. If you are using this method, it is important to have someone else monitoring the chat while you host.
- **Raise hand feature:** Some conferencing platforms include a raise hands feature. It is a button that attendees can use to let you know that they are trying to get your attention. Be sure to let attendees know how to raise their hands including the keyboard shortcut or numbers to dial by phone.

Describe Images and Videos

While you host your virtual meeting, remember that not everyone can see the visual aids that you are using. Some attendees might identify as blind/low vision and others might be joining by phone. Below are some tips on how to be more descriptive.

Slides

If you are using slides, follow this format:

- Describe the general slide layout at the beginning of your presentation
- Read the slide title every time you advance to a new slide
- Before you start talking about your slide, describe any images on the slide such as photos, graphs, charts etc. For information on how to describe images, refer to our [Social Media Accessibility Guide](#).

Videos

If you are showing videos, please include the following:

- Turn on captions if they are available
- Play an audio described version of the video if available

Captions for Videos

When showing videos at your virtual event, be sure to find a version of that video that has captions. Human generated captions are preferable over AI generated captions because they generally include character names, are more accurate and are spaced out in a more readable way.

If the video is a video that you or your organization created, please consider adding captions to it. You may find guidance on creating captions for videos in our [Audio Description and Caption Guide](#).

Audio Description for Videos

For any videos that will be screened at your event, try to find an audio described version of the video on YouTube. You can search for the name of the video with the words "audio described." You can also search for that video on the website youdescribe.org. It is a website where people volunteer to describe videos. You can use their browser extension to describe any YouTube video you would like, or request that a volunteer describe it.

Finally, if you or your organization created the video, please consider creating an audio described version of it. Please refer to our [Audio Description and Caption Guide](#) for assistance.

Plain Language

You can make your virtual meeting more understandable and accessible to attendees with developmental disabilities as well as people with limited English proficiency by using plain language. The definition of plain language is text that can be understood from the first read. This also applies to hosting and presenting. Attendees should be able to understand the information you are sharing with ease. Encourage everyone participating in your virtual meeting to use plain language when speaking. Below are some tips to follow.

- Use everyday words. If you must use technical language, define each term the first time you use it.
- Omit unneeded words

- Keep your sentences short. This will help attendees digest your ideas more easily.
- At the beginning of your meeting, let your audience know the run of show so they know what to expect.
- When presenting, state your major points first before going into details.
- Stick to one topic at a time. Jumping around between topics will confuse your audience.
- Use pronouns when you can.
- Speak using the active voice.

You can find more guidance on [plainlanguage.gov](https://www.plainlanguage.gov).

Additional Resources

- [How to Make Your Virtual Conferences Accessible to People with Disabilities \(Rooted in Rights\)](#)
- [Best Video Conferencing Platforms for People with Hearing Disabilities](#)

Virtual Platform Accessibility Resources

Zoom Accessibility Resources

- [Zoom Accessibility](#)
- [Enable Captions on Zoom](#)
- [Keyboard Shortcuts in Zoom](#)
- [Getting Started with Zoom](#)
- [How to Use Zoom with NVDA](#)

Google Meet Accessibility Resources

- [Google Meet Accessibility](#)
- [Keyboard Shortcuts in Google Meet](#)
- [How to Use Google Meet](#)
- [How to Use Google Meet with a Screen Reader](#)

Microsoft Teams Accessibility Resources

- [Microsoft Teams Accessibility](#)
- [Captioning on Microsoft Teams](#)
- [Keyboard Shortcuts in Microsoft Teams](#)
- [Get Started with Microsoft Teams](#)
- [Basic Tasks Using a Screen Reader with Microsoft Teams](#)

Other Platforms' Accessibility Resources

- [GoToMeeting Accessibility](#)
- [WebEx Accessibility](#)

Reasonable Accommodation Resources

- [List of American Sign Language Interpreting Services](#)
- [List of Captioning Providers](#)
- [List of Audio Description Services](#)

Additional Guides

The following MOPD guides can be found at nyc.gov/accessibilityguides.

- Accessible Documents Guide
- Creating Accessible PDFs using Adobe InDesign
- Accessible Slide Decks Checklist
- Accessible Social Media Guide
- Accessible Meeting Guide
- Audio Description and Caption Guide