

Remote Meetings: Tips for Accessibility

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Introduction

Telecommunication makes remote meetings possible and has opened new opportunities for participation. Well-run remote meetings are a boon for people whose circumstances prevent them from coming to the meeting room.

Technologies and practices for setting up and carrying out a meeting, though, can also create barriers. These tips aim at reducing barriers and fostering effective communication, and they can be helpful for in-person as well as remote meetings.

Adopt a policy and procedures

Planning of meetings should be based on an organizational policy and procedures. In Maine, before holding remote meetings *a public body is required to have a policy in place*. (See sample policy under Additional Resources.)

Before scheduling a meeting, the organizer should know the designated roles and responsibilities, the public notice requirements, and the technical and logistical preparations for accessibility and successful participation.

Designate a responsible individual for overseeing remote and in-person meeting arrangements.

Welcome participation

Extend to members of the group and the public a meaningful opportunity to attend and participate, including methods for effective communication.

When sending an invitation or notice of the meeting, encourage participants to request accommodation they will need to effectively engage in the event.

Plan for and test communication methods in advance to ensure they will work well.

Prepare for the meeting

Audiovisual

For remote meetings, the platform, telecommunications, and audiovisual technologies through which the proceedings are transmitted must support the auxiliary aids and services to be used, for example:

- screen readers
- CART (live captions)
- sign language interpreters
- presentation materials (slideshows or videos).

Select a telecommunication platform appropriate for the event. Learn how to operate its accessibility features and other platform tools.

Resource:

<https://www.peatworks.org/4-elements-of-an-accessible-meeting-platform/>.

Provide a dial-in phone number. This allows access to telecommunication relay service and for people who do not have a good remote video connection.

Ensure there is a reliable connection with enough bandwidth. Use a wired connection when available, instead of wi-fi.

Train the host, speakers, and presenters to operate the technology they will use for the meeting and how to use the platform to convey content accessibly.

Effective communication requires planning, arranging, and testing the system components. Test the system as it will be set up. Ensure the proceedings can be heard or perceived by all participants and anyone present can converse with the public body if they need to.

Interpreters, CART, and other accommodations

Arrange for the accommodations that have been requested. For example, if someone wants to attend at the in-person location, ensure the entrance is accessible and usable, and provide clear directions to the room.

Arrange the in-person and remote meeting rooms so the audiovisual set-up allows for participants to see the whole meeting, including captions and interpreters.

Arrange for sign language or other interpreters, if requested or needed. Advance arrangements are necessary and should be initiated as soon as requested.

Arrange for captions or CART (Communication Access Real-time Translation). It is best practice to provide captioning by default at all remote meetings. For meetings of public bodies, and captions are essential when a participant has requested this accommodation. Live CART (as opposed to automated captions) will ensure accuracy of the captions.

A transcript can be an additional accommodation people may request, and captioners should be able to provide it.

If the event is being recorded, ensure the captions will be viewable in the archived recording.

If using a CART captioner for the first time, be sure to schedule a test run with them.

Arrange for microphones that provide clear audio for participants, interpreters, and captioners.

Send materials ahead of time, sharing slide decks and other presentation materials with the participants, interpreters, and captioners, to allow their review before the meeting.

Arrange for and provide materials in alternative format, such as large print, Braille, or electronic file, if requested.

Notices

Meeting announcements – agendas, print and electronic notices – should include:

- name of the person and contact information (phone, fax, email, web) for arranging for accommodations,
- description of any accessibility features being provided, e.g., American Sign Language,
- description of how the public may access the meeting using remote methods,
- a dial-in phone number for the meeting, and
- a location for members of the public to attend in person.

Resource:

<https://www.maine.gov/accessibility/guide/presentations/announcements.html>

At the meeting

Open the meeting venue 30 minutes early and make sure the system is ready to go as planned. If using CART or sign language interpreters, confirm that they are present and that the captioning is working properly.

Connect with the audience at the beginning about how to participate:

- Only one person should speak at a time.
- When speaking, each person should start by saying their name for the captioner, interpreter, and participants. Between speakers, allow time before the next person speaking, so the interpreter or captioner can keep pace.
- If speaking, use the mic. When not speaking, remember to mute the mic.
- Describe how to submit questions, raise a hand, or troubleshoot any problems with accommodation, audio, and video.
- Indicate whether the meeting is being recorded.

Operate the accessibility features of the online platform, including tools for spotlighting interpreters, displaying materials, submitting questions, and raising your hand.

Participants should use microphones. Ensure that all relevant speech and sound are audible. Repeat questions and comments into the microphone before replying.

Make available to the public all documents and other materials considered by the public body, electronically or otherwise. Participants attending by remote methods should have access to meeting material to the same extent customarily available to members of the public who attend the meeting in person.

Describe visuals that cannot be seen by participants (*e.g.*, people on the phone).

Resource:

<https://www.maine.gov/accessibility/guide/presentations/remote.html>.

Follow Up

After the meeting, deliver follow-up materials (notes, transcript, recording, links, resources) in an accessible format. Post the recording with usable captions.

Collect feedback from participants on the content and their experience related to the accessibility of the event. Adjust accessibility practices to improve usability of content and materials in future meetings.

Acknowledgement and resources

These tips are adapted from:

Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology (PEAT):

<https://www.peatworks.org/checklist-for-an-accessible-virtual-meeting-presentation/>

and

Maine Information Technology Accessibility Committee (ITAC):

<https://www.maine.gov/accessibility/guide/presentations/index.html>

Additional resources

Sample policy (from Maine State Rehabilitation Council) -

<https://mainesrc.org/about-the-maine-state-rehabilitation-council/maine-state-rehabilitation-council-remote-participation-policy/>

Interpreter referral agencies –

https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dod/legal_interp.shtml

Meetings At a Distance includes lists of CART/caption providers –

<https://mainecite.org/meetings-at-a-distance-considerations-for-accessibility/>

National Association for the Deaf describes relay conference captioning –

<https://www.nad.org/remote-workplace-communications-access-for-employers/>

[Guidelines for Accessible Recorded and Streamed Video and Audio Materials](#)