Online meeting accessibility

The following guidance can be used when organising and running accessible online meetings. It is a supplement to the guidance provided in the **Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service — A Universal Design Approach** (the Toolkit). The guidance is based on a Universal Design approach, promoted by the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) at the National Disability Authority (NDA).

Universal Design is about creating an environment that can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people, regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.

(Part synopsis from Disability Act, 2005)

This guidance is focused on accessibility for online meetings. The Toolkit has other guidance that also applies to online meetings such as plain English, Irish Sign Language interpretation, captioning and preparing accessible documents. Some of the terms in this document are hyperlinked to the relevant section in the Toolkit. The document provides guidance for planning the meeting, during the meeting and after the meeting.

Planning the meeting

Check that the online meeting features you are using support accessibility

All controls and features should be fully accessible through the keyboard without requiring a mouse.

All controls and features such as 'Chat', 'Screen Sharing', 'Polls' and 'Question and Answer' features should be accessible to people who use assistive technology like screen reader software.

The online meeting tool should provide the possibility to use **real-time captioning** and **Irish Sign Language** services.

The online meeting tool should provide the possibility to connect using a phone line, and not just VOIP (Voice over IP).

Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service — A Universal Design Approach - Supplement – Online meeting accessibility

The online meeting tool **must** be easy for everyone to install and use.

Learn more

Check the accessibility features of the online meeting tools on their accessibility pages. Some examples are:

Zoom
Microsoft Teams
GoToMeeting
Skype
Cisco Webex Meetings

Tip

When choosing an online meeting tool, check what the vendor says about compliance with international accessibility standards. Relevant standards are **WCAG 2.1**, **EN 301 549** or **Section 508**.

Include the following information in the meeting invitation

The invitation for the online meeting should:

- Follow the Toolkit's **written text guidance.**

- Include the meeting link, meeting ID and meeting password.

- Include a list of phone numbers for participants to dial-in to access to the meeting audio.

- Include a meeting agenda in an accessible format.

- Ask participants if any accessibility accommodations are needed, so as to allow the meeting organiser time to plan ahead. Include a list of accommodations such as **real-time captioning**, **Irish Sign Language** interpretation, and documents in **accessible formats**.

- Provide a link to a list of the accessibility features and keyboard shortcuts for the online meeting tool.

- Ask participants to familiarise themselves with the online meeting tool, including the 'Chat' or 'Raise Hand' feature.

- Ask meeting participants to observe usual online meeting rules (see next section).

Tip

Before the meeting, provide all documents in an **accessible format.** This allows participants to read the materials on their own devices before the meeting.

Tip

Organise a meeting practice run through a day or two before the scheduled meeting time to ensure that all the accessibility features are working.

Ask meeting participants what works best for them.

If using captioning or Irish Sign Language interpretation, ask the provider if they have any tips or information sheets so that you can share them with participants.

Learn more

Sample resources about online meeting accessibility:

A series of guides on **real-time captions with different online meeting tools.**

Accessible **Online Meetings and Events**, from University of Minnesota.

Accessible content and online meetings from the Centre for Universal Design Australia.

Learn more

The Irish Computer Society, with the support of the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, offers training courses on **creating and checking accessible** Word, PDF and PowerPoint documents.

During the meeting

Speak clearly

Speak in a clear voice, clearly pronouncing your words. This is particularly important for participants whose first language isn't English, who need to lip read or are following **real-time captioning** or **Irish Sign Language** interpretation.

Speak clearly and at a slightly slower pace, but do not shout or exaggerate mouth movements, as this will distort your lip patterns.

Mute your microphone when not speaking.

Minimise background noise where possible.

Face the camera when speaking and do not cover your mouth or turn away from the camera

It is very difficult for persons with a hearing loss to listen or lip-read if you have your hands in front of your mouth. This is equally true if you turn away from the camera while speaking. Look directly at the camera. Do not look away, down at your keyboard, cover your face, chew gum, or have a pen in your mouth while talking.

Do not have your back to a light source

If using video, ensure you have an uncluttered background and ensure the lighting does not interfere with the view of your face. When you are talking to the camera, make sure you do not have your back to a light source (such as a window), as this will make it more difficult for a participant with a sight loss to see you or a participant with a hearing loss to lip read, as you will appear as a silhouette.

Scheduled breaks

Breaks should be given during online meetings. For long meetings, announce plan for scheduled breaks. Meeting participants who are Deaf or have hearing loss may need frequent breaks, as intense concentration on signing and following an interpreters' hand or lip movements can be very tiring.

Role of the meeting moderator: meeting rules

Meeting moderators should encourage participants to observe usual online meeting etiquette.

Moderators should:

- Ensure that only one person speaks at a time.

- Ask all participants to state their name each time they speak.

- Ask all participants to mute their microphones when not speaking.

- Encourage and remind participants to face the camera when speaking and to speak clearly and at a slower pace.

Role of the meeting moderator: working with ISL interpreters and captioners

Irish Sign Language Interpreters and real-time captioners will only interpret the speaker's audio, and not chats or documents on the screen. The meeting moderator or presenter should restate any questions from participants in the 'Chat' or 'Question and Answers' feature before answering it. This will ensure that both the question and answer are interpreted, and will also be accessible for those who are dialling in to the meeting.

Role of the meeting moderator: managing meeting accommodations

Meeting moderators should check in on meeting participants who have accessibility requirements to ensure their accommodations are working.

Meeting moderators should structure the meeting so that interpreters and participants can take scheduled breaks. This provides interpreters the chance to quickly rest or swap with another interpreter if needed.

After the meeting

Provide closed captioning for video recordings of the online meeting

Any video recordings of a meeting or webinar provided to the public after the event should have closed captions.

Meeting moderators or organisers should ask participants for feedback on their experience of the meeting and plan to improve the next meeting based on this feedback.

Learn more

For information and tools on creating or editing captions, go to the section on: **Provide closed captioning (subtitles) for videos**

Tip

One of the best ways to ensure an online meeting is accessible to everyone is to carry out regular reviews and to ask participants for their feedback.

Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service – A Universal Design Approach

Online meeting accessibility checklist

Planning the meeting

- ☐ Check that the online meeting tool supports accessibility by reading the tool's accessibility pages.

- ☐ Include a link to the accessibility information in the meeting invitation.

- ☐ Ask participants what accessibility accommodations they need.

- ☐ Provide all meeting documents in accessible formats.

During the meeting

- ☐ All participants should say their name before speaking, speak clearly and mute their microphone when not speaking.

- ☐ Moderators should encourage all meeting participants to follow usual meeting etiquette.

- ☐ Moderators should restate any questions from participants in the Chat or Question and Answers feature before answering it.

- ☐ Meeting moderators should check in on meeting participants who have accessibility requirements to ensure their accommodations are working.

After the meeting

- ☐ Video recordings of the meeting should contain closed captions.
- ☐ Get feedback and improve the next meeting based on this feedback.