Digital Presentations & Conferences Best Practices

Like all accessibility principles, these best practices are essential for some and beneficial to all. With increasing remote work, we are near constantly running and participating in voice and video calls large and small. Some of these tips may be more applicable for larger groups, but the spirit of most are important.

These guidelines are broken into three roles: organizer, presenter, and participant. For any given session, you may be one, two, or all of these roles.

About This Guideline

This guideline is created and maintained by the Library of Congress's IT Design & Development Directorate/Design Division in the Office of the Chief Information Officer.

Organizer Checklist

- Use an accessible platform
- Advertise and provide accommodations
- Caption and transcribe prerecorded events and programs
- Circulate agenda ahead of time
- Circulate presentation materials ahead of time
- Start with an access check
- Share accessibility features
- Let people know how to participate
- Manage background noise and overlapping audio

Organizer Guidelines

Accessible Platforms

Use an accessible platform for your session. It won't matter if your entire session follows the best of practices for accessibility if people aren't able to join or operate the platform. Do not require participants to share videos. For video calls, allow participants to join through a phone call when available through the platform.

Advertise and Provide Accommodations

Print and digital announcements for events should include contact information for any accommodation requests along with any required time-frames for making requests.

Accommodation requests may include American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation and live captioning known as CART. CART stands for Communication Access Realtime Translation; it is a service of live-captioning an event. This text alternatives for audio is essential for those who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deafblind. If you plan to film and publish a live event, take care to capture the ASL interpretation to make it available in the recorded video.

Caption and Transcribe Prerecorded Events

Published audio and video should have text alternatives. This means all prerecorded videos must have time-synced captions and all prerecorded audio must have transcripts. Since captions and transcripts must be accurate, computer generated captions and transcripts aren't enough.

Circulate Materials

Circulate materials ahead of time when you can. If you are presenting a PowerPoint, providing it to participants ahead of time means they can follow along with preferred magnification and assistive technologies. A participant joining by phone may not have access to presented materials, but can follow along on another device.

> **Example**: You're presenting on recent acquisitions to the collection. You've created an accessible PowerPoint with slides listing out the acquisitions and a graph of the public's use of one of the collections. You email participants with the presentation materials the morning of the meeting and remind them of the agenda. One of your colleagues uses screen magnification and can more easily read the graphs on their own computer than through screen sharing. One participant is having connectivity issues and calls in. They downloaded the presentation that morning so are able to follow along. They are able to download the presentation and follow along on their own device.

Circulate Agendas

Circulate the agenda ahead of time. Agendas can be as simple as including a bullet list of topics to cover in the meeting invite. This is important for cognitive accessibility, gives people a sense of what to expect, and contributes to more efficient meetings!

Access Check

Start with an access check. Access check is a time to share accessibility features and to pause with participants for a moment and check in. At a minimum, ask:

1. Is my volume level okay? Am I speaking loud enough?
2. Is my speaking speed okay? Am I speaking too fast?

Share accessibility features of the session. During the access check is a good opportunity to remind participants of accessibility features and how to find them. We want to make sure everyone can take advantage of these features.

> **Example**: At the start of a live-streamed author talk, the moderator let's everyone know that the talk is being captioned. They share on the screen a shortened version of the url to access the captions. The link to the captions is also in the text description of the event.

> **Example**: At the start of a presentation on recent acquisitions, you remind people that you emailed the presentation deck right before the meeting.

Let people know how to participate

Let people know how to participate, remind participants to mute themselves, and ask that everyone avoid overlapping speaking.

Let people know how to participate in terms of asking questions or commenting. This is particularly important with large presentations or town hall style meetings. Set expectations around taking questions through a platforms chat or comments functionality or vocally.

During this time is a good moment to announce if attendees are automatically muted. You can also remind participants to avoid overlapping speaking and to mute themselves when not speaking. Background noise can cause distraction and/or make it difficult to distinguish what is being said. It can be a good idea to let people know how to mute/unmute themselves on the platform if they may not be familiar with that functionality.

> **Example**: The department's HR rep is holding an info session on open enrollment to 35 staff members. They let staff know that they are muted by default, but can always ask questions through chat either to the group or to just the HR rep. The presenters also let attendees know that they will pause periodically if participants wants to un-mute themselves and ask a question. This gives staff who called in an option to ask questions.

Presenter Checklist
- Create accessible materials
- Communicate title and text of slides
- Describe media
- Include captions and transcripts

Presenter Guidelines

Accessible presentation materials
Make sure your presentation materials are accessible. This includes social media promoting the event and presentation materials.

Accessible Presentation Resources
- [Microsoft's step-by-step instructions on making PowerPoints accessible](#)
- [Improving the Accessibility of Social Media in Government](#)

Communicate title and text of slides
When showing slides or other materials announce the title or general purpose. This is as simple as reading out the title of a new slide and making sure you communicate all the text points on the slide. This ensures everyone has access to the slide content including people who called in without video, have low-vision, or are blind. It also helps cognitive accessibility.

Describe media
Describe any media like images, graphs, charts in your presentation. For most images, a quick sentence or two suffices. If you are showing a chart or graph, include a short description of what is being conveyed in the graphic. If you are doing a demo, be sure to describe what is happening visually on the screen. If you are showing a video, describe the action on screen. As with the point above, this is important for people who called in without video or have a visual disabilities.

Example: At a team meeting, you are sharing out slides on a recent conference you attended and presented at. You include a photo of your presentation and say: "Here I am on stage with the rest of the panel with a good turnout of maybe 25 people, which was exciting". You've succinctly communicated the content and reason for the included picture.

Example: You are presenting on project milestones. There is a slide listing three recent accomplishments and a photo of a dog wearing a party hat. You read through the three accomplishments and say: "And, I included this picture of my dachshund wearing a party hat to celebrate!"

Include captions and transcripts

If you are including video or audio in your presentation, include captions and transcripts.

Example: During a presentation on recent acquisitions you play several 30-20 second audio clips of an oral history while showing a slides with the transcription text. You circulated your presentation materials ahead of time so participants have the audio and text available for later reference.

Participant Checklist
- Mute yourself when not speaking
- State your name when you begin speaking
- Don't speak over others

Participant Guidelines

Mute yourself when not speaking

Mute yourself when not speaking. Background noise can cause distraction and make comprehension difficult. With conference calls, background noise complexity increases with every participant. Even what seem like small noises like typing on a keyboard can cause significant disruption.

State your name when speaking

State your name when you start speaking. Announce yourself when speaking to identify yourself to other participants. This helps other identify who is speaking.

Don't speak over others

Don't speak over others. Overlapping audio can make comprehension difficult and speaking over others is disrespectful.

Resources
- [WAI Presentation Guidelines](#)
- [Accessible Virtual Meetings Guide from NYC's Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities](#)