Event Accessibility Considerations
Virtual Events

Before the Event

Preparing for your virtual event in advance ensures a smooth experience for all participants. Ask speakers and presenters to log in 15 minutes before the start time to test audio, lighting, and video settings and check that their virtual background is not fading or blurring.

During the Event

At the start of the event, the host or moderator should mention that they will read aloud any notes shared in the chat box. This will give participants who are non-speaking a way to share their thoughts.

If your event involves multiple speakers, include a moderator to facilitate turn-taking. Ask each speaker to state their name every time they begin speaking. This practice helps everyone, particularly people who are blind, have low vision, or have cognitive disabilities, keep track of who is talking.

Attendees who are not speaking should be muted or asked to keep their microphones muted to minimize background noise. Additionally, when not speaking, participants should turn off their video to help people focus on the speakers. The sign language interpreter's video should always remain on.

Consider scheduling breaks throughout the event to give participants time to process information and address personal needs. It is recommended to break for 10 minutes after every hour.

Visual Descriptions

When someone speaks for the first time, they should give a visual description of their appearance, such as, "Hello, I'm Eric. I'm a white man with black hair. I'm wearing glasses and a blue shirt." This supports people who are blind or have low vision.

If visual aids, such as PowerPoint slides, are being used, the presenter should describe the content on screen before delivering any talking points. Note that participants using screen readers cannot access shared presentations and will need a copy of the presentations. Share slide decks in advance or link to them in the chat at the event's start.

Speakers who show video clips without audio descriptions (narrations describing what viewers see on screen) should describe the visuals beforehand to ensure all attendees understand the content. This is particularly important if you plan to record and share your event because it is unlikely that an audio description can be added afterward to a recording of a fast-paced virtual meeting.

Pre-Recording

If you plan to livestream your event but are concerned about technical issues, consider pre-recording parts and saving the recording to YouTube, which provides auto-captioning. While the audio captioning is often inaccurate, you can edit the captions. Disability Belongs™ edits captions of all YouTube videos we upload. The process is quite simple, and instructions can be found at bit.ly/correcting-captions.

YouTube captions can take a day or two to process. Users can access a video's captions by opening the video and clicking the CC button. When you share a link to your video in your communications, include instructions for accessing the captions.

Additionally, create a transcript for your videos.

Hybrid Events

To make your event as accessible as possible, allow both virtual and in-person attendance. Use features like chat boxes to ensure both audiences can participate fully, and provide materials like invitations and handouts in both printed and digital formats.

Increasing Virtual Access Through Technology

Remember that some individuals who want to participate in your event may not have electronic devices, internet access, or the stable internet connection required for video meeting platforms or streaming. One way to support them is to offer a device-borrowing and temporary internet access program.

When planning your program:

- Consider encouraging community members to donate working laptops and tablets.
- Ensure all devices are updated with the necessary meeting platform software and set up for ease of use.
- Provide clear step-by-step instructions in plain language.
- For those who need internet access, offer prepaid Wi-Fi hotspots.
- You might also organize volunteers to deliver devices or arrange pickup from a central location, ensuring you check with recipients about secure drop-off points.
- Remember that congregate living facilities, including nursing homes, assisted living buildings, group homes, and senior residences, may not allow visitors.

Sample text for sharing information about a device-borrowing and temporary internet access program:

"We have a limited number of electronic devices, including computers or tablets, available to borrow if you do not have your own equipment. We also have Wi-Fi hotspots available to borrow if you need internet access. These will be available on a first-come first-served basis. Please contact us with the following information."
I would like to borrow:

_ Tablet
_ Laptop
_ Either one
_ Wi-Fi hotspot
_ I would like someone to help me use the equipment