

Meetings for Everyone: A Guide to Accessibility

As we all know, the way we meet has changed dramatically over the past few years. Recently EARN's Leadership Group met to discuss how to best ensure our meetings are inclusive and accessible for all. Guided by Christine Malone, Manager, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion, Canada Post, and with input from participating members, we have compiled these tips to enhance the accessibility of your meetings.

This guide offers practical tips and insights based on best practices and current trends. Whether you organize meetings, present, or participate, you'll find valuable guidance to make your meetings accessible for everyone.

General considerations for all meetings

1. Understand your participants' diversity and needs, and schedule meetings with inclusivity in mind.
2. Consider the purpose of the meeting for effective universal design.
3. Establish safe space guidelines.
4. Provide accessible services and materials such as real-time captioning, alternative to print formats, assistive listening devices, etc.
5. Build a buffer to the agenda to accommodate potential communication issues or extended discussions.
6. Use descriptive language to ensure inclusivity for individuals with low or no vision by verbally describing all visual content displayed on the screen during presentations and discussions.
7. Offer a feedback channel, such as an email address, to all attendees either at the meeting's onset or a survey at the end of the meeting.

	In Person	Virtual	Hybrid (in addition to In-person and Virtual considerations)
Organizers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce service providers to participants. • Plan the space for mobility aids and breaks. • Promote a scent-free environment. • Provide feedback mechanisms and advance materials. • Use large print and contrasting colors for signage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose appropriate platforms considering participant needs. • Seek consent for recording from participants before or at the start of the meeting. • Ensure that technology allows for both written and verbal participation in the meeting. • Address technical issues promptly and ensure written participation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure installed audio system and microphone usage by all participants for effective support, including virtual participation and required services like simultaneous translation. • Provide additional support for moderation both online and in person.
Chair/Facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform participants of available services. • Describe the agenda and materials clearly. • Encourage clear communication and minimize interruptions. • Remind about a scent-free environment. • Ensure accessibility during Q&A sessions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review technical features and how to access them. • Allow introductions and spotlight support services such as ASL (sign language interpretation) • Manage participation through hand-raising and monitoring chat. • Be mindful of chat usage to avoid disruption for screen reader users. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternate speakers or comments from both modes of communication. • Encourage participants to avoid side conversations for better speaker engagement and response.

<p>Presenters</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stick to the schedule and provide materials in alternative formats. • Use accessible fonts and colours in presentations. • Caption video materials and describe visuals. • Speak clearly and periodically check for understanding. • Use plain language and concise materials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to stick to the slot on the shared agenda. • Take pauses for comprehension and alignment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure to use the microphone provided and speak clearly.
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Resources

- Government of Canada, accessed April 30th, 2024, < <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability/arc/inclusive-meetings.html>>
- Government of Canada, accessed April 30th, 2024, <<https://bati-itao.github.io/resources/events-en.html>>
- Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (2013), *Guide to Accessible Meetings*, <https://www.omssa.com/docs/OMSSA_Guide_to_Conducting_Accessible_Meetings_-_EN.pdf>
- Crowdsourcing from EARN’s Leadership Group Members