

Virtually Accessible:

A Guide to Creating Accessible Webinars

In today's digital era, virtual events have become an essential way to engage with a wide audience. It is crucial to ensure that these events are accessible to all participants. By following a few guiding principles and best practices, you can ensure that your virtual events provide equal access to everyone.



Quick Take

- When you have an online training, it's important to make sure it is accessible.
- You can do this by using a platform that has features like captions and options for sign language interpreters.
- It's also a good idea to send out any slides or materials before the event, so people have time to look at them.
- During your event, explain what's happening on the screen, read chat messages out loud, and make sure everyone has a way to ask questions.
- Small changes like these can help everyone feel included and be able to participate.

Effective Communication and Digital Accessibility

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that communication with people with disabilities be as effective as communication with those without disabilities. This applies to Title II entities (state and local governments) and Title III entities (businesses and nonprofits that serve the public). Therefore, it's essential to design your virtual events to ensure equally effective communication for all participants. "Digital accessibility" refers to creating websites, mobile applications, and electronic documents that can be easily navigated and understood by a wide range of users. When providing training remotely, following digital accessibility guidelines will assist you in meeting the requirement for effective communication.



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Selecting an Accessible Platform

When hosting a virtual event, it's important to choose a platform that is accessible. Not all video conferencing platforms offer the same level of accessibility features, so it's wise to research each platform's commitment to accessibility. You can visit their websites for more information or consult with organizations that specialize in digital accessibility to get recommendations. Additionally, observing what platforms these organizations use can help you make an informed decision. At a minimum, you should choose a platform that offers the following options:



- Automatically generated transcripts
- The ability to integrate third-party human captioners
- Keyboard shortcuts for navigation and features like muting/unmuting microphones, turning video on/off, and raising hands
- The ability to spotlight specific videos for ASL-English interpreters
- The option to include spoken language interpreters

Preparing for Your Meeting

Offering Accommodations

Providing a way for attendees to request accommodations during registration is a key step in making your virtual events more inclusive. Attendees may need captioning, accessible materials, sign language interpreters, or other accommodations, so include an accommodation request form in the registration process. Ensure your budget covers these accommodations so they are available when requested.

Proactive Captioning

It's beneficial to provide at least automatic captions for your event, even if no specific request has been made. Captions are useful for many people, including those who are Deaf or hard of hearing, non-native speakers, or anyone accessing the event in a noisy environment. If you plan to archive the event, captions will also make it accessible to a wider audience.

Accessible Materials

Ensure that any materials shared during the event, such as slides or documents, are provided in an accessible digital format. These materials should be sent to attendees in advance to ensure that those using screen readers or text-to-speech technologies can fully participate. This is especially important for blind attendees or anyone who may need extra time to access the content.

Prep Materials for Access Providers

It is very helpful for interpreters and captioners to have access to materials that will be used during the session. Providing the names of presenters or speakers ahead of time is also helpful for these service providers.

Before Your Event Begins

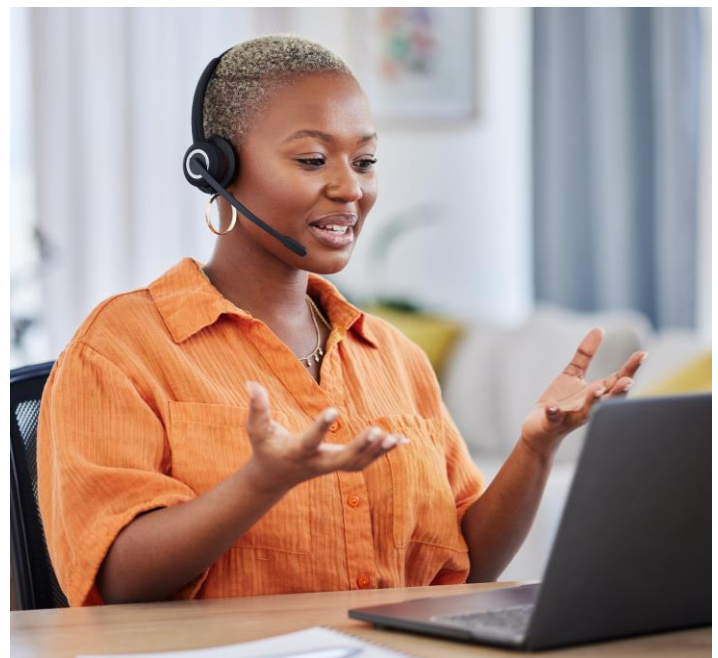
Before your virtual event, it's important to take several steps to ensure accessibility:

- **Access Options:** Provide multiple options for attending the event, such as through a computer, phone dial-in, or recorded versions.
- **Provide Advance Materials:** Send any materials you plan to discuss or share ahead of time so attendees can review them before the event.
- **Accommodations Requests:** Ensure there's a process in place for attendees to request accommodations, and make sure those requests are fulfilled. Check the resources below for sources for interpreters and captioners.
- **Enabling Accessibility Features:** If you are providing automatic captioning instead of human-generated, make sure to turn the captions on.
- **Preparation for Captioning Providers or Interpreters:** If you're providing human-generated captioning or American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, ensure they are ready to go before the event begins.
- **Use the Waiting Room Feature:** If using a platform with a waiting room or lobby feature, let interpreters or captioners before the other attendees.
- **Assign a Co-host:** Assign a co-host to manage technical issues, ensuring the event runs smoothly even if you encounter any difficulties.

During Your Meeting

While the event is taking place, there are additional best practices to follow:

- **Orient Attendees:** At the beginning of your webinar, provide information about how to access the captions, accessible materials, and how you will handle questions and comments.
- **Consider Accessibility When Screen Sharing:** Don't assume everyone can see or access what is being shared on the screen. Describe content being displayed for those who may not be able to see it.
- **Read Chat Messages Aloud:** If questions or comments are posted in the chat, read them aloud before responding to ensure everyone is included.
- **Minimize Background Noise:** Reducing background noise improves the quality of communication for all participants. Using a headset can help with this.
- **Camera Off Option:** Allow attendees to turn off their cameras if they prefer, as this can make the event more comfortable for some participants.
- **Introductions:** Encourage attendees to introduce themselves during discussions to ensure everyone is aware of who is speaking.
- **Equal Participation:** Make sure everyone has a way to ask questions or make comments that is accessible to them.





By implementing these strategies, you'll be able to create an inclusive and accessible virtual event that allows everyone to participate fully. Small adjustments and thoughtful planning can make a significant difference in ensuring accessibility for all.

Suggested Resources

- [ADA Requirements: Effective Communication](#)
- [Explore Access: Accessible Documents](#)
- [PEAT: 4 Elements of an Accessible Meeting Platform](#)
- [What is Digital Accessibility? \(YouTube\)](#)

This handout is available in an accessible format at:

uofapartners.uark.edu/projects/increasing-digital-access/

To request other formats, contact us, partners@uark.edu.



U of A Partners is administratively located in the College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Arkansas. Partners is the Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service.

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