



Planning to Support Participant Access and Engagement for Virtual Meetings



To plan a virtual meeting that fully and effectively engages participants, imagine the meeting experience from the perspective of different participants: What will they need to have and know prior to the meeting? What will they need to be able to see, hear, and do during the meeting?

This checklist focuses on the technical considerations for active stakeholder participation.

1. Prepare the platform for participants and vice versa.

- Provide system requirements and guidance for logging on in promotional information and registration confirmation.
- Build a review of navigation and use of the meeting platform into the agenda for each meeting.
- For participants who do not have ready access to the internet, consider identifying or establishing:
 - » Secure but public “hot spots” where participants may access Wi-Fi signals,
 - » Equipment loan programs, or
 - » Satellite sites where small groups of stakeholders may join using one connection.
- For participants who need to join by internet and phone (because they have unstable internet connections or computers without audio capability) or solely by phone, provide:
 - » Phone dial-in information using local or toll-free numbers, or
 - » ‘One-touch’ dialing options that preset the numbers and symbols needed for a cell phone to connect to the meeting.
- Designate a contact person and publish their email and phone number for technology questions.

2. In-meeting platform features can enhance the meeting.

- Help participants get to know each other:
 - » Encourage participants to be on camera,
 - » Include an intentional roll call in the agenda, and
 - » Include agency name and/or role in participants’ names that are shown on screen.
- Promote relationships among participants:
 - » Encourage participants to be on camera (again),
 - » Collaboratively set and confirm meeting norms, including ground rules for indicating the desire to speak, asking questions, identifying who is speaking, and commenting in the chat,
 - » Use polling and chat functions to allow participants to share thoughts on specific topics, and
 - » Dedicate time for discussions, and break into smaller groups when possible.
- Use platform functions to manage groups of more than 10 people:
 - » Allow participants to express themselves in ways other than talking (polling, chatting, ‘raising a hand,’ activating emojis, etc.), and
 - » Use breakout rooms or separate meeting rooms to divide a large group into smaller ones for more intimate discussions or subcommittees.



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3. Platforms can and should be accessible for everyone.

- Designate a contact person and publish their email and phone number for accessibility needs.
- Establish and clearly communicate a deadline for receiving accessibility requests from participants; give yourself at least a week.
- Learn about your platform's options for captioning and translation. Some platforms and subscription levels may provide automation or integration with outside services.
- Participants who are Deaf may use relay services, captioning, or interpreters. Participants who do not speak or understand English may be supported using captioning or translation services. When interpreters or translators are engaged:
 - » Communicate with them before the meeting to let them know who they will be supporting,
 - » Encourage involved parties to log in early and get situated within the virtual environment, and
 - » Facilitate involved parties to highlight each other's videos and to use private chat to communicate without involving the entire group in 'behind-the-scenes' conversations.
- For accessibility for participants with vision impairments:
 - » Use accessibility checkers to optimize presentations and documents, and
 - » Present information using both text and audio, both visual and description.

For comprehensive information about web accessibility for people with disabilities, bookmark [Section508.gov](https://www.gsa.gov/section508), the GSA Government-wide IT Accessibility Program website. The site has links to information for specific virtual meeting platforms:

- » **Microsoft Teams**
<https://support.office.com/en-us/article/accessibility-overview-of-microsoft-teams-2d4009e7-1300-4766-87e8-7a217496c3d5>
- » **Adobe Connect**
<https://blogs.adobe.com/connectsupport/downloading-and-running-a-closed-captioning-pod-in-a-connect-meeting/>
- » **Webex**
<https://help.webex.com/en-us/WBX47352/How-Do-I-Enable-Closed-Captions>
- » **Zoom**
<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/207279736-Getting-started-with-closed-captioning>