

# Best Practices for Hosting Accessible Virtual Meetings

Accessibility, Strategy and Planning / Chief Information Office / Shared Services Canada

Version 2.0

Date: 21 February 2022

## Introduction

The Government of Canada (GC) is committed to being an accessible employer and service provider, not only because it is the right thing to do and required under the *Accessible Canada Act*, but because an inclusive public service is more innovative, efficient and productive.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Shared Services Canada (SSC) is playing a leadership role in the transformative culture shift to take place at all levels of the public service[[2]](#footnote-3) to realize a GC that is inclusive by design and accessible by default.

Hosting virtual meetings may present barriers for many individuals including those with disabilities. Using the following checklist will help you ensure that every participant has equal access to your meeting. This checklist is intended for use in all stages of hosting a virtual meeting — before, during and after. The recommendations cover accessibility features for people with visual, hearing, physical, cognitive and learning disabilities.

## Best Practices

### Before the Meeting

* **If possible, plan two sessions: one in English and one in French**

**WHY?** This simplifies the use of interpretation and captioning services and avoids excluding unilingual participants

* If you decide to host a bilingual meeting, understand that there are barriers that may not be able to be overcome
* ensure that the audio is set up that you get both the speaker speaking and the translator translating to the same language on the same audio channel (e.g. when an English speaker is speaking English and then switches to speak in French, the same audio channel is used so that the translator then comes onto the line and translates until the speaker resumes speaking English.)
* provide simultaneous translation
* provide CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) captioning
* ensure separate English and French decks are provided so participants can understand each slide
* **Choose a platform with accessibility features such as assistive device compatibility and a “pin” video feature**
* Microsoft Teams is recommended (but keep in mind that no tool is 100% accessible)

**TIP:** The desktop version of Microsoft Teams supports more accessibility features than the browser version

* Understand how your platform works and time your posting of key information accordingly (for example, did you know that if you post information in the Chat before a participant joins the meeting (in non-recurring meetings), they may not be able to access the information. Therefore, make sure to post important links several times, or delay posting links until everyone has joined for meetings).
* **Provide multiple ways to join the meeting such as dial-in**
* **Avoid requiring participants to pre-register or using systems like Eventbrite**

**WHY?** Registration can create barriers and confusion, and the registration system itself would also then have to be accessible

* **Ensure all meeting-related emails are accessible**
* **Provide any presentation decks, in an accessible format, in advance of the meeting so participants can follow along if they can’t access the presentation in the meeting platform. See instructions below on how to share the deck instead of sharing your screen so participants can change their view of your deck and can scroll at their own pace.**

**HOW?** See [Digital Accessibility Toolkit](https://canada-ca.github.io/a11y/index.html)

**TIP: Sending emails in HTML format is the most accessible format. You can set it if it’s not already set to HTML in** Microsoft Outlook: Format tab > “More commands” drop-down menu (three dots at top right) > choose “HTML”

* **Send invites including:**
* A description of the meeting including the topic and context
* A link to join the meeting
* A dial-in number for the meeting
* Suggest that participants using laptops also join the meeting by phone for clearer audio than provided by a laptop
* Information on accessibility services being provided so participants are aware they do not have to arrange their own
* Contact information for accommodation requests and a submit-by date[[3]](#footnote-4)
* Recommendation that the deadline be a minimum of 3 weeks in advance of the event to allow you time to make appropriate arrangements
* A short guide to using the platform including:
  + [Keyboard shortcuts](https://techcommunity.microsoft.com/t5/microsoft-teams-blog/top-10-keyboard-shortcuts-to-make-you-a-microsoft-teams-super/ba-p/1384428#:~:text=Top%2010%20keyboard%20shortcuts%20to%20make%20you%20a,sent%20(without%20needing%20to%20click%20on%20%E2%80%9C%E2%80%A6%E2%80%9D)%20)
  + How to [“pin” the video](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/adjust-your-view-in-a-teams-meeting-9825091c-0e7d-4c2b-95f5-eba644f19175?ui=en-us&rs=en-us&ad=us) of an interpreter or key speaker
  + Information on the platform’s accessibility features (such as the [Microsoft Teams Accessibility Overview](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/accessibility-overview-of-microsoft-teams-2d4009e7-1300-4766-87e8-7a217496c3d5?ui=en-us&rs=en-us&ad=us))
* **Send agenda and additional material in accessible formats at least 48 hours in advance or post the information on a GCPedia page for participants to refer to**
* See [Digital Accessibility Toolkit](https://canada-ca.github.io/a11y/index.html)

**TIP:** Set font colour to “automatic” in material being sent

* Send all attachments as separate emails outside of calendar invitation

**WHY?** Some individual cannot access attachments within calendar invites

* **Secure necessary services such as:**
* Interpretation services (ASL, LSQ, speech reading)
* CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) services for live transcription on a separate display
* When booking CART services specify if you want the captioning in capitals or mixed case. Historically upper case lettering was the standard in Canadian English language closed captioning. It is now recommended to use mixed case in all programs being captioned in English Canada. Originally TV captions were in all caps because older technologies didn’t allow to display them in mixed case as well as all capitals. However, technology has advanced to allow for a more crisp display of mixed case letters. It applies to all types of captioning access for TV, and videos.
* Captioning services for transcription overlaying a video or webinar
* Ask each service provider for their assigned team’s email addresses so you can provide the meeting links and materials directly to them

**TIP**: [Microsoft Teams’ closed captioning](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/use-live-captions-in-a-teams-meeting-4be2d304-f675-4b57-8347-cbd000a21260) and [PowerPoint Live Presentations auto-captioning](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/present-live-engage-your-audience-with-live-presentations-039aa2cc-67fa-4fb5-9677-46ed8a060c8c) offer some auto-captioning capabilities, but should not be used in place of captioning services

* Translation services
* **Send meeting material to service providers and inform them of terms and context specific to the meeting topic**
* **Remind presenters to:**
* Use plain language and explain all terms and acronyms
* Use a minimum of 18-point sans-serif fonts (such as Arial or Verdana) with high-contrast colours (such white on black) in visual material being presented[[4]](#footnote-5)

**TIP:** The [Luminosity Contrast Ratio Analyzer](https://juicystudio.com/services/luminositycontrastratio.php) is a way to check if the colours you are using have acceptable contrast

* Avoid using animations and moving images like GIFs[[5]](#footnote-6)

**WHY?** They can contain flashes that can trigger seizures in individuals with photosensitivity. They are also distracting.

* Ensure adequate lighting when sharing video for individuals who lip read
* Be aware of [in-meeting etiquette](#InMeetingEtiquette)
* **Review presenters’ material to check for plain language, accessible font and high contrast colours**

**TIP:** Office 365 apps (Word, Outlook, PowerPoint and Excel) have a built-in [Accessibility Checker](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/improve-accessibility-with-the-accessibility-checker-a16f6de0-2f39-4a2b-8bd8-5ad801426c7f)

* **If using Microsoft Teams, encourage presenters to use the Share PowerPoint feature instead of just sharing their screen**

**HOW?** During a Microsoft Teams meeting: Share icon > Browse > Select PowerPoint from computer or OneDrive

**WHY?** This allows assistive technology like screen readers to engage with the PowerPoint

* **Leave time for periodic recaps of content**[[6]](#footnote-7)
* **Limit meeting length to 90 minutes to allow use of interpreters**
* **When possible, assign a notetaker**

**TIP:** Microsoft Teams has a built-in [meeting notes feature](https://support.microsoft.com/en-gb/office/take-meeting-notes-in-teams-3eadf032-0ef8-4d60-9e21-0691d317d103?ui=en-us&rs=en-gb&ad=gb#:~:text=%20Take%20meeting%20notes%20in%20Teams%20%201,channel%20where%20the%20meeting%20occurred%20and...%20More%20)

* Consider assigning supporting roles to facilitate the meeting including:
* Master of Ceremonies – to introduce the speakers, facilitate questions
* Moderators – to monitor and answer the Chat or Q&A area
* Presenters – present the materials and verbally answer questions
* Administrator – to be the point of contact for your service providers in case they run into any issues

For large meetings or virtual presentations preparing a script in advance with your housekeeping information (disconnect from VPN, etc) and with the script for the moderator and messages you want posted in the Chat or Q&A area are helpful to keep the meeting moving. Include information on how to submit questions if you are the 301st person in a Microsoft Teams meeting as they will have a view only mode of the presentation and will not have access to the Chat.

### During the Meeting

* **When possible and with the consent of** **all participants, set the meeting to be recorded**[[7]](#footnote-8)

**WHY?** This allows participants to review the presentation and take notes at their own pace

* **Mute participants upon entry and inform them of this**
* **Introduce interpreters and/or captioners**
* **Put the links to captioning service in Chat or Q&A area**
* and provide the Teams Meeting link / Streamtext or 1CapApp links in the Chat or Q&A area if attendees need to attend multiple sessions to access the presentation and these services.
* When posting the links in the Chat or Q&A area, ensure you put the full link text, not just “click here” as attendees won’t be able to “click here” and require the full string. **Send the links by email or include in your meeting invitation if possible**
* **Remind participants how to “pin” interpreters and speakers if needed**
* **As part of your script, remind participants of** **in-meeting etiquette:**
* Log out of VPN
* Stay on mute when not speaking
* Keep camera off if not presenting, to reduce visual stimuli
  + Interpreter is exempted

**WHY?** So their signing is visible to participants

* + If a participant feels comfortable, they can turn their camera on when speaking for participants who lip read
* Indicate who is speaking every time the speaker changes
* Speak at a moderate pace and enunciate clearly
* Avoid jumping between languages
* Describe all visual material (such as PowerPoints and screen shares)[[8]](#footnote-9)

Read titles of presentation slides to allow people to follow along.

* Read relevant Chat messages aloud
* Send relevant links sent in Chat by email
* **Consider that Chat, polling and hand-raising features are not accessible or reliable on all platforms**[[9]](#footnote-10)

### After the Meeting

* **Electronically distribute a recording, transcript, and summary of the meeting and additional materials in accessible formats**[[10]](#footnote-11)
* See [Digital Accessibility Toolkit](https://canada-ca.github.io/a11y/index.html)
* Braille, DAISY, audio, large print, diskette, CD, DVD or flash drive versions may also be required[[11]](#footnote-12)
* **Invite participants to share feedback on their experience**

### Keep in Mind

* Participants may be constrained by hardware capabilities and Internet speed
* It is ideal to plan all virtual meetings to be inclusive by default, rather than requiring participants to make accommodation requests
* In some cases, an accommodation for one participant can become a barrier for another

## Resources

For information on accommodations and adaptive computer technology or to schedule a consultation on making services, content or technology accessible, contact:

### [**Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology** (AAACT)](https://www.canada.ca/en/shared-services/corporate/aaact-program.html)

* + Telephone: 819-994-4835
  + TTY: 819-994-3692
  + Email: [aaact-aatia@ssc-spc.gc.ca](mailto:aaact-aatia@ssc-spc.gc.ca)

### Making Documents Accessible

* + [Digital Accessibility Toolkit](https://canada-ca.github.io/a11y/)

### Microsoft Teams

* + [How to Use Microsoft Teams (video)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CH2seLS5Wb07614fb0-a583-49f6-84da-6872223e74a0)
  + [Microsoft Teams Screen Reader Guide](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/use-a-screen-reader-to-explore-and-navigate-microsoft-teams-47614fb0-a583-49f6-84da-6872223e74a0)
  + [Microsoft Teams Accessibility Overview](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/accessibility-overview-of-microsoft-teams-2d4009e7-1300-4766-87e8-7a217496c3d5?ui=en-us&rs=en-us&ad=us)

### Office 365 (only available on SSC internal network)

* + [365Central](https://163gc.sharepoint.com/sites/collaboration)
  + [Office 365 Accessibility](https://163gc.sharepoint.com/sites/Collaboration/SitePages/Accessible-Office-365.aspx)

### SSC’s Plain Language Team

* + Email: [ssc.plainlanguage-langageclair.spc@canada.ca](mailto:ssc.plainlanguage-langageclair.spc@canada.ca)

### Translation Bureau ([GC Internal Network](http://gcintranet.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/bt-tb/index-eng.html) | [External](https://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/bt-tb/index-eng.html)) - Interpretation Services

* + Visual Interpretation
  + Telephone: 819-997-1275
  + Email: [btintervisuelle.tbvisualinter@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca](mailto:btintervisuelle.tbvisualinter@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca)
  + Official and Indigenous Languages Interpretation
  + Telephone: 613-996-3346
  + Email: [btinterpretationlo.tbolinterpretation@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca](mailto:btinterpretationlo.tbolinterpretation@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca)

**Additional** USA Resource

* + [GSA Section 508.gov](https://www.section508.gov/create/accessible-meetings/)

## Version Log

| Version | Date Completed | Revisions |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | August 25, 2020 |  |
| 2 | January 11, 2022 | Various clarity and language revisions, revisions to resources section, Revisions to incorporate SSC experience with virtual learning series, incorporating feedback and formatting fixes |
| 3 | January 27, 2022 | Images were put to be inline with text for accessibility purposes |

1. [Foreword – Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity-inclusion-public-service/accessibility-public-service/accessibility-strategy-public-service-toc/accessibility-strategy-public-service-forword.html#toc1) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. [Introduction: Accessibility strategy for the Public Service of Canada](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity-inclusion-public-service/accessibility-public-service/accessibility-strategy-public-service-toc/accessibility-strategy-public-service-introduction.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. [NYC Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities – Accessible Virtual Meetings Guide](https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/mopd/downloads/pdf/virtual-meetings-accessibility-guide_05-01-2020.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. [Planning Inclusive and Accessible Events – Employment and Social Development Canada](http://www.gcpedia.gc.ca/gcwiki/images/3/3f/Guide-Planning_Inclusive_and_Accessible_Events.pdf) (available on GC internal network only) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. [Readability Guidelines – Content Design London](https://readabilityguidelines.co.uk/audiences-devices-channels/presentations/) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. [Essential Accessibility: How to Make Virtual Meetings Accessible](https://www.essentialaccessibility.com/blog/how-to-make-virtual-meetings-accessible) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. [Checklist for an Accessible Virtual Meeting & Presentation – Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology (PEAT)](https://peatworks.org/checklist-for-an-accessible-virtual-meeting-presentation/) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. [Accessible Virtual Meetings - Ontario Digital](https://medium.com/ontariodigital/accessible-virtual-meetings-d9b947eff592) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. [Internet Society](https://www.internetsociety.org/blog/2020/07/are-your-virtual-meetings-accessible-for-people-with-disabilities-start-with-this-checklist/) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. [Checklist for an Accessible Virtual Meeting & Presentation – Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology (PEAT)](https://peatworks.org/checklist-for-an-accessible-virtual-meeting-presentation/) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. [Planning Inclusive and Accessible Events – Employment and Social Development Canada](http://www.gcpedia.gc.ca/gcwiki/images/3/3f/Guide-Planning_Inclusive_and_Accessible_Events.pdf) (available on GC internal network only) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)