

# Best Practices for Hosting Accessible Virtual Meetings

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

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## 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

#### Languages / Translations

If possible:

* plan two sessions: one in English and one in French
  + **Tip:** This simplifies the use of interpretation and captioning services and avoids excluding unilingual participants

If you decide to host a bilingual meeting, you must:

* provide simultaneous interpretation
* ensure that the audio is set up so that you get both the speaker and the interpreter on the same audio channel for the same language
  + **Tip:** 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 CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) captioning
* ensure separate English and French PowerPoint decks are provided so participants can understand each slide

#### Platform

* Choose a platform with accessibility features such as assistive device compatibility and a “pin” video feature
  + **Tip:** Microsoft Teams is recommended (but keep in mind that no tool is 100% accessible). Please note that 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
  + **Tip:** For example, if someone joins a Teams meeting after you’ve posted something in the Chat, they may not be able to see it. In meetings where people have access to the meeting once (not recurring meetings) post important links several times, or delay posting links until everyone has joined in
* Provide multiple ways to join the meeting such as dial-in
* Avoid requiring participants to pre-register or using systems like Eventbrite
  + **Tip:** Registration can create barriers and confusion, and the registration system itself would also then have to be accessible

#### Invitations

Send invitations which include:

* a description of the meeting including the topic and context
* a link to join the meeting
* a dial-in number for the meeting
  + **Tip:** You can suggest that participants using laptops can also join the meeting by phone for clearer audio than provided by a laptop
* Information on accessibility services being provided
  + **Tip:** This is necessary so that participants are aware they do not have to arrange their own
* Contact information for accommodation requests and a submit-by date[[3]](#footnote-4).
  + **Tip:** Our recommendation is to set 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))

#### Sending meeting support information

* Ensure all meeting-related emails are accessible
  + **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 all attachments as separate emails outside of calendar invitation
  + **Tip:** Some individual cannot access attachments within calendar invites
* Provide any presentation deck, in an accessible format, in advance of the meeting
  + **Tip:** That way participants can follow along if they can’t access the presentation in the meeting platform
* 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
  + **Tip:** Set font colour to “automatic” in material being sent
  + **Tip:** Visit the [Digital Accessibility Toolkit](https://canada-ca.github.io/a11y/index.html) for more information on how to make content accessible

#### Secure meeting services

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 that you want the captioning in mixed case
* Captioning services for transcription overlaying a video or webinar
* Translation services

Prepare for the services:

* Ask each service provider for their assigned team’s email addresses so you can provide the meeting links and materials directly to them
* Send meeting material to service providers and inform them of terms and context specific to the meeting topic

**Warning:** [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.

#### Assign meeting roles

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
* Notetaker – 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)

#### Accessible presentation content

* Use a minimum of 18-point sans-serif fonts (such as Arial or Verdana)
* Limit the text on each slide and use clear language
* Use a consistent design throughout the presentation
* Start presentation slides with a summary/overview and end with a review of the most important points
* Use high-contrast colours (such white text on black background) in visual material being presented[[4]](#footnote-5)
* Use [Colour Contrast Analyzer](https://www.tpgi.com/color-contrast-checker/) (free color contrast checker tool)
  + **Tip:** We recommend using it to determine if the colours you are using have an acceptable contrast ratio
* Use the built-in [Accessibility Checker](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/improve-accessibility-with-the-accessibility-checker-a16f6de0-2f39-4a2b-8bd8-5ad801426c7f) for Office 365 apps (Word, Outlook, PowerPoint and Excel)
* Avoid using animations and moving images like GIFs[[5]](#footnote-6)
  + **Tip:** Animations and GIFs can have adverse effects on people with cognitive disabilities and brain injuries

#### Presenters’ preparation

Remind presenters to:

* Use plain language and define all terms and acronyms
* Indicate who is speaking every time the speaker changes
* Speak at a moderate pace and enunciate clearly
* Avoid jumping between languages
* Describe all meaningful actions and imagery (such as demonstrations or complex images like graphs and charts)
* Read titles of presentation slides to allow people to follow along
* Read relevant Chat messages aloud
* Send relevant links sent in Chat by email following the meeting
* Consider that Chat, polling and hand-raising features are not accessible or reliable on all platforms[[6]](#footnote-7)

#### Planning time

* Leave time for periodic recaps of content[[7]](#footnote-8).
* Limit meeting length to 90 minutes to allow use of interpreters.

#### Create scripts

* For large meetings or virtual presentations prepare a script in advance.
  + **Tip:** It should include your housekeeping information (such as disconnect from VPN, etc.).
* Create a script and messages you want posted in the Chat or Q&A area for the moderators
  + **Tip:** These 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

#### Handling participants

* When possible and with the consent of all participants, set the meeting to be recorded[[8]](#footnote-9)
  + **Tip:** This allows participants to review the presentation and take notes at their own pace
* Mute participants upon entry and inform them of this
* Give people time to process information and pause between topics.
* 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. Interpreters are exempted 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

#### Handling interpreters and/or captioners

During the meeting make sure you:

* Introduce interpreters and/or captioners
* Put the links to captioning service in Chat or Q&A area
* When posting the links in the Chat or Q&A area, ensure you put the full URL
* Send the links by email or include in your meeting invitation if possible

#### PowerPoint Live

* If using Microsoft Teams, encourage presenters to use the Share PowerPoint feature instead of just sharing their screen. This allows assistive technology like screen readers to engage with the PowerPoint
  + **How:** During a Microsoft Teams meeting: Share icon > Browse > Select “Browse OneDrive” or “Browse my computer” > Select PowerPoint from computer or OneDrive

### After meeting

#### Infosessions summary

* Electronically distribute a recording, transcript, and summary of the meeting and additional materials in accessible formats[[9]](#footnote-10)
  + **Tip:** See [Digital Accessibility Toolkit](https://canada-ca.github.io/a11y/index.html) to make it accessible
  + **Tip:** Braille, DAISY, audio, large print, diskette, CD, DVD or flash drive versions may also be required[[10]](#footnote-11)

#### Feedback

* 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.

## Resources

#### Contacts

##### AAACT

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 program](https://www.canada.ca/en/shared-services/corporate/aaact-program.html) (AAACT)

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

##### Plain Language

For SSC’s Plain Language Team, contact:

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

##### Visual Interpretation

For the translation bureau of multilingual interpretation and accessible communications service, contact:

* Telephone: 819-997-1275
* Email: [btintervisuelle.tbvisualinter@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca](mailto:btintervisuelle.tbvisualinter@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca)

##### Official and Indigenous Languages Interpretation

For the official and indigenous languages interpretation, contact:

* Telephone: 613-996-3346
* Email: [btinterpretationlo.tbolinterpretation@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca](mailto:btinterpretationlo.tbolinterpretation@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca)

#### Links

##### 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)

##### Translation Bureau

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

##### Section508 Resource on Accessible Meetings

* [Create Accessible Meetings | Section508.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 |
| 2 | January 27, 2022 | Images were put to be inline with text for accessibility purposes. |
| 3 | February 11, 2022 | Entire document rewrite was undertaken. The document headings were rewritten in order to make it more scannable. Content was moved around and grouped in order to create information relationships. |

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. [Internet Society](https://www.internetsociety.org/blog/2020/07/are-your-virtual-meetings-accessible-for-people-with-disabilities-start-with-this-checklist/) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. [Essential Accessibility: How to Make Virtual Meetings Accessible](https://www.essentialaccessibility.com/blog/how-to-make-virtual-meetings-accessible) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. [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-9)
9. [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-10)
10. [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-11)