



Massachusetts Office on Disability

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Memorandum

To: Commonwealth Training Departments and ADA Coordinators

From: Mary Mahon-McCauley, Executive Director

Date: 6/17/2020

RE: Accessible and Inclusive Virtual Trainings

Purpose:

The purpose of this memorandum is to offer guidance to state agencies in their effort to provide accessible virtual meetings and presentations.

Federal and state anti-discrimination laws require state agencies to provide inclusion and opportunity to people with disabilities including employees and members of the public. Programs, services, and activities of state government, including in person and virtual meetings/presentations, must be conducted in a way that provides equivalent access unless to do so presents a fundamental alteration. Providing reasonable accommodations and effective communication are critical components to achieving equal access.

Reasonable accommodations are workplace adjustments or modifications to existing policies, practices, and procedures that are necessary to ensure that employees or members of the public with disabilities can equally participate in a program, service, or activity.

Effective Communication ensures that people with vision, hearing, or speech disabilities can communicate, receive, and convey information in a manner that is accessible to them. Agencies must furnish auxiliary aids when needed to communicate effectively with people who have language-based disabilities. Examples of auxiliary aids for meetings/presentations may include accessible electronic documents that can be read with assistive technology, large print documents, American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, and Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART) services. The agency, department, or entity that is hosting the event is responsible for providing ASL and CART along with other needed accessibility features.

Considerations for Ensuring Accessible Virtual Meetings and Presentations

Selecting a Platform

After determining which platforms meet an agency's operational needs, the agency should consider selecting the platform that provides the highest level of accessibility.

Consult with vendors and review their accessibility statements which offer insight into how various users with disabilities would interact with the platform. Find out how the system would work with CART, an ASL interpreter, or closed captioning or if a screen reader or strictly keyboard user could access features such as screenshare, chat, and video recording.

If an agency has identified a platform that meets its operational objectives but has inaccessible features the agency should determine which barriers are likely to prevent access and whether those features are critical. If the identified barriers are not critical then the agency should avoid using those features during the meeting/presentation. For those components deemed to be critical but not accessible, the agency should explore alternative ways that a participant with a disability can effectively participate in the meeting/presentation.

Presentation materials

To the extent possible, ensure that all presentation materials are accessible to and usable for people with disabilities including those using screen readers and other assistive technologies and those requiring large print. Since users of screen readers cannot read documents through a screen share and those using magnification may find that screen share video may be distorted with increased magnification, providing these materials in advance would allow these participants to better follow the discussion in real time.

Information and communication technology deployed by Executive Branch Agencies must be usable by people with disabilities. How-to guidance as well as references to relevant laws, regulations, and standards to help comply with this requirement can be found through the following link:

<https://wiki.state.ma.us/display/assistivetechgroup/IT+Accessibility+home>.

Additionally, our colleagues with the Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities have created learning modules on making Microsoft Office documents accessible to people with disabilities. Access to these modules can be found through the following link:

<https://gov.texas.gov/organization/disabilities/accessibledocs> .

Plan Ahead

Secure ASL interpreters and CART services in advance of the date of the meeting/presentation. These important communication services can easily be offered on a digital platform. The

Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing provides interpreting services and the information below will help you to schedule an interpreter:

- Request ASL Interpreting or CART
 - a. Online: <https://www.mcdhh.net/request/>
 - i. Choose ASL Interpreting or CART under *Service Information*
 - b. Phone: 617-740-1600 VOICE and 617-740-1700 TTY
- Additional information on how to request an interpreter is available at <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/request-an-interpreter>.

Keep in mind that depending on the nature of the meeting, these services might be required regardless of whether an individual has specifically requested it (e.g. public meetings where there is no registration or invitee list). In instances where participants have been invited in advance, the invitation should include a directive to notify the agency holding the meeting/presentation to identify whether they require ASL or CART to participate. This can be included in the reasonable accommodation statement described in the next paragraph.

Reasonable Accommodation Statement

When advertising meetings/presentations, be sure to include a reasonable accommodation statement that informs invitees to notify the host agency of any modifications to policies, practices, or procedures that they would need to equally participate due to a disability related limitation. This statement should include a point of contact and a date by which requests should be received in order to ensure that the agency has adequate time to secure the accommodations. Also, be sure to state that you will try to accommodate a request after the deadline and work with the person requesting the accommodation but may be unable to fulfill the request due to time constraints.

Best Practices

- Do a trial run. If you have already identified employees who need to use accessible features of a platform, ask them to test it with you.
- Determine which features will be used in the meeting/presentation and include details about how to use those features on the meeting/presentation invitation or reminder. For example, provide a list of commonly used shortcut keys that can be used on the platform or any specific instructions that pertain to users of assistive technology.
- When sending a meeting reminder, include the link to CART so the user can access the meeting link and the link to the CART platform in one place.
- Send out accessible meeting materials in advance.

- Become familiar with the features of the platform, including the accessible features and share them with participants. This could include providing a link to CART in the chat window, offering a brief overview of how to interact with the platform at the beginning of the meeting/presentation, and providing these types of verbal instructions for the duration as features are being utilized.
- Utilize closed captioning features when and if available.
- If the meeting/presentation will be recorded, advise attendees at the start. Inform the CART reporter in advance if you want a copy of the transcription.
- When using ASL make sure that the video remains prominently visible onscreen throughout the meeting/presentation. Depending on the platform, this may require asking participants to turn off their video to ensure that the interpreter can be seen or possibly be displayed more prominently.
- If audio quality is an issue, consider requesting that participants turn off the video feature if it is not essential to participation.
- When using screenshare or presenting materials on screen, provide a verbal explanation of what is being displayed so that those participating by phone or those who are unable to see the document or review the materials with assistive technology will be better able to follow along.
- If you are planning on using a video as part of your training or presentation curriculum then it should have audio description or the visual aspects of the video should be described before or in between the dialogue of the video by a person on the training team.

If you have questions regarding this memorandum, please call MOD at 617-727-7440 press 3 and then 1 or e-mail: mod-info@mass.gov.