

COVID dramatically increased the need for virtual meeting options, particularly in the telehealth arena. According to the CDC, telehealth visits went up 154 percent in the last week of March 2020 compared to the same time in 2019. While virtual meeting software is proving to be vital and effective right now, there is still room for it to improve, especially for people with disabilities.

HOW TO CHOOSE ONLINE MEETING TOOLS

Basic Requirements

- Reliable high-speed internet
- Device with video and audio capabilities
- Webcam

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- What do you need to do in your meetings?
- How easy is the tool to use?
- Does it integrate into my existing technology?
- How much does it cost?
- Is it accessible?

ACCESSIBILITY FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

- Make sure audio is clear. Poor audio quality can make it hard for people to access the event.
- Have speakers use a headset to improve audio. Speak clearly and slowly.
- Mute all attendees except those speaking to keep background noise to a minimum.
- Take turns. Ask people to raise their hands and speak their names every time they speak, so captioners and attendees alike all know who is talking.

CAPTIONS OR SUBTITLES

- Process of displaying text to provide additional or interpretive information

SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING

- Spotlight or Pin the interpreter so they can always be seen.

PROPER LIGHTING

- Eliminate unwanted shadows that skew facial expressions or appearance.
- Face the light source.
- Avoid overhead lighting.
- Use the right amount of light.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR BLIND AND LOW VISION

- Describe live scenarios and images.
- Read any text that appears on screen.
- Make sure the speaker's face is well-lit and can be clearly seen.
- If there is a method that will be used to vote or flag who can speak next, make sure all participants can access the process.
- Show persons how to adjust the interface so anyone using a screen reader or screen magnifier can adjust the video windows as needed.
- Turn on high contrast settings and adjust the font settings, if available, to make text more visible.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR COGNITIVE NEEDS

- Be patient when explaining how to use online platforms. Repeat information if necessary.
- Use plain language during the event. Avoid using jargon.
- Build processing time/breaks into your event. Leave ample time for questions.

Accessible Telehealth and Online Tools (cont'd)

ACCESSIBILITY IN COMMON VIRTUAL PLATFORMS

ZOOM

- Supports screen readers
- Supports ASL interpreters
- Automatic closed captioning
- Manual captioning (must retain a captioner)
- Keyboard shortcuts
- Support for high-contrast mode

GOOGLE MEET

- Supports screen readers
- Supports ASL interpreters
- Automatic closed captioning
- Manual captioning (must retain a captioner)
- Keyboard shortcuts

TEAMS

- Supports screen readers
- Supports ASL interpreters
- Automatic closed captioning
- Manual captioning (must retain a captioner)
- Keyboard shortcuts
- Support for high-contrast mode

GOOGLE HANGOUTS

- Sign language interpreter app
- Has screen magnifiers and visual modifications

BLUEJEANS

- Supports screen readers
- Automatic closed captioning
- Keyboard shortcuts

GOTOMEETING

- Manual captioning (must retain a captioner)
- Keyboard shortcuts
- Support for high-contrast mode

HOW TO PREPARE FOR ONLINE MEETINGS

PREP YOUR TECHNOLOGY

- Know what kind of technology is being used.
- Request accommodations.
- Consider a test run.

PREP YOUR ENVIRONMENT

- Remove distractions and excess noise.

TEST YOUR AUDIO

- Make sure you can hear well.
- Consider an amplified phone.

PREPARE YOUR ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

- Have AT "ready to go."

ENLIST A SUPPORT PERSON

- Have someone participate in the telehealth visit or meeting.

DURING THE APPOINTMENT

- Ask to have information repeated.
- Ask for visit or meeting notes.