Accessibility Guidelines for Hybrid Meetings

Hosting hybrid meetings can present unique challenges as we try to bring groups together from both remote and in-person locations. The following is guidance is focused on accessibility to ensure all individuals can participate in the meeting without facing barriers to accessing the meeting's content.

UDR recommends hosting hybrid meetings using virtual meeting software such as Zoom since it offers greater flexibility of use, and more accessibility features, than alternatives (such as a telephone-based hybrid meeting). UDR also recommends that, whenever possible, the in-person portion of a hybrid meeting be held in a room with a large screen and with integrated speaker and microphone systems, as this permits a better visual and audio experience for all participants.

Before the Meeting

- Determine the purpose, format, and overarching goals of the meeting. For example, will participants view/hear a keynote speaker, or is the goal meaningful communication within your internal team?
- Determine how many participants will be present, who will be speaking, and where the physical meeting will take place.
- Determine what print or video materials will be used, and what platform may be used to register for a meeting or event (if applicable), and ensure they meet digital accessibility standards. More information on purchasing accessible technology can be found on the Digital Accessibility Services website.
- If the meeting will be in a room that you have never used before, visit the room to get a sense of the size, furniture set-up, and audio/visual technology that exists to plan the best setup.
- Enlist local IT support to go over setup for room audio and video to develop a plan so all participants can be seen and heard.

Marketing the Meeting

- Include basic information in your marketing materials – location, expected audience size, whether captioning or interpreting will be offered, etc. This helps participants determine if they need to request a reasonable accommodation.
- Include an accommodation statement in the invitation and publicity materials.
- Marketing materials should use high contrast, plain font with minimal or no visual distractions. Any digital marketing materials should be screen reader compatible. Here is more information on making digital content accessible.

Responding to Accommodation Requests

Requests should receive a timely response. Any cost associated with reasonable accommodations is covered by the sponsoring entity. The accommodation preferred by the participant should be given primary consideration, however, in some circumstances, several accommodation options may be available, and the event may provide an equally effective alternative accommodation. For further questions or consultation during this process, please contact UDR.

Common requests include, but are not limited to:

- Digital materials provided in advance for review (this permits participants who are blind or have low vision to access the content using a screen reader, or it can give access for someone who requires extra time for processing)
- Live captioning (the AI automatic captioning feature, if available in your web conferencing platform, is helpful but does not provide the necessary accuracy for those who require an effective communication as an accommodation and thus, a request for a live captioner may be requested)
- American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter
- Meeting location to be moved to a physically accessible location
- Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs) might be requested for a large meeting, if someone is attending in-person and requires an additional level of assistance to access the audio component of the meeting. ALDs are available for [loan to Harvard community members](#).

Setting Up the Physical Space

- Ensure there are no physical barriers such as stairs or heavy doors, to accessing the [physical space for the meeting](#).
- Audio (microphones): ensure the room is equipped with enough high-quality microphones so remote participants can hear clearly. If multiple microphones are not a viable option, consider supplementing your audio input by having in-person attendees pass around a hand-held microphone before speaking.
- Audio (speakers): when using a central audio source in the room, ensure that on-site participants turn off the volume on individual devices if applicable.
- Video: plan to capture all aspects of the meetings for those who are joining remotely – including the faces of all in-person attendees, shared presentations and documents, and materials. For example, use one camera (i.e. on a laptop, mounted to a tripod, etc.) to face in-room attendees. This permits participants who rely on lip reading for communication to access that information. If applicable, use a second camera to be moved to display close-up views of presenters, flip charts, wall charts, etc.
- Captions: Ensure that captions and subtitles can be viewed simultaneously by online participants and in-person participants. For example, live captions could be on a display on a central screen(s) in the room while also being available on the remote meeting platform.
- Speaker space: if speakers will be in an elevated location, ensure that a ramp or lift is available to facilitate speakers or participants accessing the elevated location. If a podium is to be used, ensure it is adjustable or that modifications can be made so that participants of any height may use the podium. Ensure that video equipment can be repositioned to accommodate a range of speaker heights.

Setting up the Remote Space

- Plan to [mute participants that are not actively speaking](#) to minimize feedback and noise. Decide if participants should be able to unmute themselves.
- Enable the live automatic captioning feature, if available in your web conferencing platform (note that if the meeting is held through Zoom, [this must be done in advance of sharing a meeting link](#)).

- Ensure that online waiting rooms are disabled so online participants that lose connection can easily rejoin without disturbing the hybrid meeting.
- Disable the doorbell sound for participants entering the room so it does not disturb a meeting in progress.
- In advance of the meeting, provide attendees with accessible digital materials and share within the web conferencing platform or email to attendees.
- Start the meeting a few minutes early to allow participants time to log in and resolve any technical issues.

During the Meeting

- If individual, in-person participants are using laptops to ensure that all participants are on video, ask each participant to turn the volume off on their laptops, and mute themselves, so that audio can be channeled through room microphones and speakers.
- Designate a moderator: assign someone to guide and facilitate the conversation, monitor the chat online, and call on people who have their hands raised. The moderator can also provide reminders when needed to help keep communication clear, such as reminding people to use the online chat and use microphones. If audio is being channeled through microphones in the room, zoom will not highlight the speaker producing the audio. Therefore, the moderator should manually spotlight speakers on the video so that remote participants can see the speaker, including to access lipreading if they use that for communication.
- Establish expectations and meeting etiquette at the start of the meeting, such as:
  - Ask participants to silence phones/devices.
  - Ask participants to keep their devices on mute unless speaking.
  - Ask participants to raise their hand and identify themselves before they speak (which also encourages turn-taking). This allows everyone to follow along, regardless of their location.
- Provide an audio description of all visual meeting content (such as content on slides) so that those participating by telephone or participants who are blind or have low vision can access the content (slides shared through zoom's screen sharing feature are not compatible with screen reader technology).
- Repeat back or paraphrase what participants say.