Best Known Methods for Creating Accessible Digital Microsoft Teams Meetings

# 2021

## Notes:

* Microsoft Teams continuously upgrades its accessibility features and options. To stay abreast of such changes, please check: [Accessibility Overview of Microsoft Teams](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/accessibility-overview-of-microsoft-teams-2d4009e7-1300-4766-87e8-7a217496c3d5)  (additional links at the end of this document)
* Teams “meetings” are different than “live events*.”* Accessibility features may vary depending on which you use: [Accessibility Tips for Inclusive Microsoft Teams Meetings and Live Events](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/topic/accessibility-tips-for-inclusive-microsoft-teams-meetings-and-live-events-fa0cb694-0fcd-4019-b67c-8270ea4e0c54)

## Share Information About Accessing Teams on Mobile Devices, Desktop App and Browser:

At this time, it is not possible to have a fully accessible Teams experience on small screens, such as mobile devices. It is best to tell participants during registration that content is typically best accessed through a desktop or laptop computer using the desktop app rather than accessing Teams through a browser. Please review the [Difference in performance of the Teams Browser vs. Desktop App](https://businesstechplanet.com/microsoft-teams-browser-vs-desktop-app-what-are-the-differences/)

## Provide an Email or Phone Number for Those Experiencing Accessibility Problems:

Provide an email or phone number for voice and texting to assist with accessibility barriers during the event and during the registration period. This contact information should be in an easy-to-find location in event and registration materials. Ensure that someone responds within a reasonable period and that responders know how to answer questions and resolve problems and/or know whom to contact for help.

## Ask all Participants Whether They Will Need an Accommodation:

Here is language that we adapted from Microsoft and use for our events. Please note, this has worked quite well for Disability:IN:

*“[Company Name] is committed to a welcoming, accessible experience. If you need accommodations or accessibility to join and participate in the (event name), please specify your request in the comment box below.”*

This question is followed by:

*“Will you be using a screen reader?”*  \_\_Yes \_\_ No

The reason we ask the screen reader question is that materials such as PowerPoint presentations, Word documents, etc., shown on the screen during the meeting, are sent in advance to those using screen readers so they can download the digital documents onto their own devices.

## Provide Live Captioning for Events and Breakout Rooms:

* **Assume not everyone needing captions will request them:** Unfortunately, not all participants will inform you of their need for captioning. For example, someone for whom English is a second language will find the captioning helpful in comprehending what is being said but may not think to ask for it or may not think of it as an accommodation. This is also true for those who are hard of hearing but unwilling to check the box that they need an accommodation. By providing live captioning at all events, including breakout rooms, you make it possible for everyone to successfully participate.
* **Problems of AI for captioning**: Until automatic Artificial Intelligence (AI) captioning is perfected, it is best to have an actual person do the captioning. For global companies with participants from around the world, we have found that AI captioning does not work well with accents and while getting better, it is not as reliable as a human captioner.
* **Captions in breakout rooms:** Teams Artificial intelligence (AI) captioning works in breakout rooms; however, breakout rooms do not support human Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), at this time.

* **Contracting with a Captioning Service**: The Disability:IN resource titled [**Questions for Captioning and Transcription Vendors During Procurement Process**](https://disabilityin.org/resource/questions-for-captioning-and-transcription-vendors-during-procurement-process/)provides useful information for companies contracting with vendors for human captioning.

## Recording the Meeting for Future Viewing:

CART captions are not included in Teams recordings since Teams does not save them into a CART transcript. If you use a live captioner, you can request a transcript from the company or individual providing the service.

To ensure that the sign language interpreters are visible on recordings, be sure to spotlight the interpreters during the broadcast.

## Visual Descriptions During Introductions:

For people who are blind or low vision, or for people participating by phone or otherwise without a screen, i.e., people driving, having presenters visually describe themselves during their introductions paints a picture of the speakers and lets the audience know that the speakers are diverse and relatable. We recommend that companies adopt a standard practice for speakers to use during their introductions. Our recommendation is to choose 4-5 salient features:

* Race/ethnicity (Identifying by race/ethnicity is a way to create an inclusive culture and a tool to help eliminate implicit bias.)
* Disability status (if the person is open to self-disclosure, but not required)
* Hair color, hair style, facial hair
* Gender and pronouns, e.g., she/her/hers; he/him/his; they/them/theirs. (Using correct personal pronouns is a way to create an inclusive culture.)
* Location

**For example**: I am a white woman with long, wavey salt and pepper hair in my home office in California. My pronouns are she/her.

## Reading Aloud and/or muting the ‘Chat’ discussion during meetings:

There are two primary accessibility concerns with the Teams Chat function:

* Screen readers cannot always access content in the ‘Chat’. For this reason, speakers should read aloud what appears in the ‘Chat’ box. Stopping periodically to read what people are saying makes the event more interactive and assures that everyone is part of the discussion.
* For screen reader users, listening to the communication in the chat window interferes with listening to the presentation. For this reason, when you know screen reader users are participating consider turning off (muting) the chat for portions of the presentation. This can also cut down on information overload that is challenging for many people, disabled or not: [Hide-Unhide-Mute or Pin-a-Chat in Teams](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/hide-unhide-mute-or-pin-a-chat-in-teams-9aee02ef-713d-495b-8a73-9762d8e4b066)

## Sign-language interpreters in Teams meetings and breakout rooms:

In the main room, the host can spotlight the interpreter for everyone, or each person can pin individually**.** In breakout rooms, interpreters need to be pinned by individuals: [Five Tips for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Using Teams](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/topic/5-tips-for-using-teams-when-you-re-deaf-or-hard-of-hearing-21132160-bc6a-4838-9eff-583e2df2becb)

For Teams “Live Events,” the interpreter must be invited as a panelist. If the meeting will be recorded, be sure the interpreter will be visible on the recording, which currently requires spotlighting the interpreter. Be sure to use the “Fit to Frame” setting to see the entire video.

It is good practice to communicate in advance with participants who rely on sign language to discuss personal preference, as some people who cannot/choose not to speak may want to bring their own sign language interpreter for voice output, while relying on your meeting interpreter for other aspects of the meeting.

## Teams Polling Feature:

According to Microsoft’s employees and external customers who are screen reader users, they are successfully using the Teams polling features.

## Transcripts:

It is good practice to have a transcript of the event that can be reviewed afterwards. Teams “Live Transcription” provides a transcript when selected by the organizer. When the meeting is over, the transcript is immediately available in the meeting event on the calendar. Meeting participants can download it as a .docx or .vtt file. To learn more, please read [Transcription in a Teams Meeting](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/view-live-transcription-in-a-teams-meeting-dc1a8f23-2e20-4684-885e-2152e06a4a8b). Vendors providing human captioning should also be asked to provide a transcript.

## Considerations for Deafblind Participants:

Video conferencing can be challenging to Deafblind participants who rely on a refreshable Braille display attached to their computer to receive Braille output of written text. For a real-time experience, the captions move too fast for most Braille readers, so they typically have the captions sent to a separate app where they can read them at their own pace, such as the Streamtext website or the 1CapApp. Some Deafblind people prefer 1CapApp, while others prefer Streamtext. For reviewing the transcript after the event, the transcript from the Teams app can be exported to the user’s personal device. Transcripts are essential to provide full access to deafblind participants.

## Inclusive Practices Beyond the Tech:

Accessibility and inclusion require more than accessible technology. Some best practices for non-tech inclusion include:

* Making it a practice for speakers to always introduce themselves before speaking, and to include a visual description (see above) the first time they speak..
* Reminding participants not to interrupt – always good for everyone, but especially important for people relying on captioning and sign language interpreters.
* Being sure to describe all visual content on slides, including visual content in videos (typically called audio description).
* Find more resources in the section titled: “Look Beyond the Tech and Make Virtual Meetings as Inclusive as Possible” in the Disability:IN resource titled [Best Practices for Digital Accessibility and Remote Work](https://disabilityin.org/resources2/covid-19-response-accessible-tools-and-content/)
* **Additional Teams accessibility resources:** Microsoft offers accessibility information on its website that is constantly updated. It is good practice to send the Teams accessibility information in the calendar invitation or in the registration materials for the event. Many people cannot use a mouse, for example, and having the keyboard shortcuts available can make the meeting experience smoother for all users
  + [Accessibility Overview of Teams](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/accessibility-overview-of-microsoft-teams-2d4009e7-1300-4766-87e8-7a217496c3d5)
  + [Keyboard Shortcuts for Microsoft Teams](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/keyboard-shortcuts-for-microsoft-teams-2e8e2a70-e8d8-4a19-949b-4c36dd5292d2)
  + [Teams Live Transcription](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/view-live-transcription-in-a-teams-meeting-dc1a8f23-2e20-4684-885e-2152e06a4a8b)
  + [Teams Live Captions](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/use-live-captions-in-a-teams-meeting-4be2d304-f675-4b57-8347-cbd000a21260)
  + [Using a Screen-Reader with Teams](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/basic-tasks-using-a-screen-reader-with-microsoft-teams-538a8741-f21b-4b04-b575-9df70ed4105d)

* + [Five Tips for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Using Teams](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/topic/5-tips-for-using-teams-when-you-re-deaf-or-hard-of-hearing-21132160-bc6a-4838-9eff-583e2df2becb)
  + The [Microsoft Disability Answer Desk](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/accessibility/disability-answer-desk?activetab=contact-pivot%3aprimaryr9) is available to people with disabilities who have accessibility questions about Microsoft products.

For more information, please contact Jeff Wissel, Disability:IN Chief Accessibility Officer (CAO), [Jeff@Disabilityin.org](mailto:Jeff@Disabilityin.org)