

Ensuring Access with Virtual Programming on Zoom

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Please Note Before You Read:

While we of course want this information to be shared far and wide to promote greater access, the process of gathering this information was an incredible amount of hard work, through troubleshooting at several live events and the generous expertise of disabled people who participated in our programs and patiently guided us. If you find this document useful and are at all able to make a contribution to show your support for this work, please donate to the Longmore Institute on Disability at: <https://longmoreinstitute.sfsu.edu/make-gift>. If you have additional zoom access needs not addressed in the document or would like to receive our help as consultants for your next program, contact: Emily Beitiks, beitiks@sfsu.edu.

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Executive Summary:

The coronavirus outbreak has obviously caused huge hurdles for traditional public programming, amongst greater tragedies shaking our world right now. However, a noteworthy positive outcome is that the world has been pushed to consider virtual forms of community gatherings and events, something that many disabled people, such as those living with chronic illnesses, chronic fatigue, and multiple chemical sensitivities, have long been calling for with limited responses. Because the majority of people are now experiencing the restrictions of being homebound, virtual forms of participation fortunately no longer seem unreasonable, and the disability community has even led the charge in some ways of showing how virtual communities can exist. Yet, while virtual access to programming opens up opportunities for some people with disabilities, we also need to ensure that the virtual realm isn't closing off opportunities for others by strategizing how to make these programs as accessible as possible. This brief document provides strategies for hosting accessible public programs on Zoom webinars, sharing the expertise learned through many trial and error programs led by the Longmore Institute on Disability, which had a diverse range of participants with disabilities who shared their feedback,

allowing us to improve over time. Special thanks to San Francisco State University's IT Specialist Cristian Alvarado, our event ASL interpreters (anonymous), who helped trouble-shoot and solicited feedback from the Deaf community, Crip Camp tech expert Rosemary McDonnell Horita, and disability activist and educator Lydia Brown, who shared tips and ideas.

Strategies for moderating online programming

Bringing greater access to online programming requires more than just finding an online way to host an event exactly as it would have been done in person. To maintain access, the online program requires more planning and structure and less fast-paced back and forth dialogue, which is challenging for Deaf and blind/low vision (and telephone participants) to keep up with. Ask your moderator to come up with the majority of questions in advance and plan who will speak when, and then share that line-up with your panelists, interpreters, and captioners, so that people can be prepared to turn their video/sound on and off, speeding things up. Make sure your moderator knows that they need to play a more active role than in person moderating typically requires, as each question needs to be directed at a specific panelist, naming that panelist, so that people not relying on the visual can follow who is talking. Every time panelists switch off, you should be comfortable with a brief pause, to allow interpreters to switch off, which is a bit slower online as they have to start/stop video and the host may need to switch the spotlight on their video (see ASL section for more information). Disability studies scholar Alison Kafer has written about the concept of "crip time," where "rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds." Embracing a slower pace to online panels and programs may be hard at first, but the payoff will result in much stronger programs that can be enjoyed by a wider audience.

Captioning:

First, you will want to make sure you book a captioner who has experience offering captions remotely. Fortunately thanks to our current environment, most now do! As with non-virtual events, providing your captioner with the line-up of speakers and key-terms will strengthen the quality of their captioning.

Next, when you set up the meeting or webinar, you will want to make sure that the "closed captions" box is checked. While zoom offers an option where you can "assign a participant to type," allowing anyone in the meeting to type their fastest to transcribe the meeting, the most high quality captioning will come by hiring a professional captioner and synching with Zoom via a third party option so that their stenographer software properly functions, allowing for faster communication. To set this up, before the zoom starts (so long as you've set up the webinar to "enable practice session"s), you can open the webinar as if you are going to start the program, then click on the "CC" button, and next choose the "third party" option. Copy the url (the "API token") and send it to your captioner. They will paste that into Streamtext (or the third party link they're using) as they set up captioning.

To set up your captioner further, you can include their name and email on your list of panelists designated in the webinar settings. This will allow them to login and set up captioning before your event broadcast officially begins.

When you are ready to start your broadcast, find your captioner from the panelists on the participant list. Then, right click on their name and select "Assign to captioning." They will then be able to start typing captions into their third party service, which will synch it with Zoom.

A word of feedback from hearing impaired users: the zoom interface has been improving with recent updates, but many users still prefer a more customizable option for viewing. Next to the CC button, you can click the "^" and then select "View full transcript" if participants prefer this. Also, we recommend sharing with your attendees the streamtext link for better view of captioning, which allows font personalization, in case hard of hearing participants also have a vision impairment.

Some notes about the video view for your participants: First, if your program will play any videos, you should either turn off captioning during the film screening or encourage your captioning-using participants to open the chat box in it's own window at the start; otherwise, chats will pop up and block captions as they come in. Second, make sure that the host selects to "hide non-video participants" so that when your attendees see all the panelists, your captioner is no longer included with a black box.

Read it on Zoom: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/207279736-closed-captioning>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a06O8JmpPZA>

Watch a video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a06O8JmpPZA>

ASL for Deaf Participants:

There are a number of strategies that you can do to make a program accessible for Deaf participants or attendees. Strategies vary depending on the number of participants speaking on a given program. For more details, visit this important resource:

https://www.deafhhtech.org/rerc/accessible-virtual-meeting-tips/?fbclid=IwAR3C_CWIIynVIUWbZBDJWhUorAPu9ntW823Ut7p4Ab1ikRIYq5jH9jhqX0Q

Make sure when you are booking an interpreter, you inform them that it will be on Zoom, as some are not comfortable with this format. Also, please make sure to inform them whether or not the program will be recorded, as many interpreters will not allow this. Lastly, in the case of a program that requires more than one interpreter, please provide the interpreters with a line-up of who will talk and the schedule of the event, allowing them to plan in advance for when they will switch off. Add your ASL interpreters' emails to the panelists list on the webinar setup back-end, which will allow them to log-in before the official event broadcast begins to get set up.

Interpreters should keep their camera on as they are interpreting and turn off when they are waiting. It's of particular importance that their internet be high speed enough to maintain a constant stream through the program.

The host's computer should be set to "gallery view" to help them ensure that the participants are seeing the interpreters' videos, and you must also select that the participants always see Gallery View under "More" once the host has the participant sidebar open. You should select "hide non-video participants" which will remove your captioners' box and any other non-participating event organizers from the Gallery view to make the boxes bigger, increasing access for ASL viewers. To ensure that users on smart-phones, tablets, or chromebooks have easy access to the interpreter, especially important for DeafBlind viewers, you should spotlight the active interpreter's video, switching who is spotlighted as the interpreters switch off, and then also spotlighting any additional speakers on the screen. If you do not do this, and have a slideshow or screen share, all your viewers will lose ASL access.

Important to note that if you are using Zoom to record the program, it will record only the spotlighted interpreter's video if you only have it set up to record "active speaker view" (the default), so make sure to select that the recording also capture gallery view.

Before you attempt the "Share Screen" function, you must make sure to "spotlight" the interpreter's video. The participants will see the shared screen, and only a small box of the interpreter's video. If you want a non-deaf speaker to also be seen, you can now spotlight more than one video, a zoom improvement as of 9/2020.

4. Blind/Low Vision Access and Audio Description

Zoom has come a long way from its earliest platform and is now in general accessible with screen-reading software. The chat function, while technically accessible, can become pretty unmanageable if a program has large numbers of participants and an active chat line. Our best recommendation would be to never assume your audience has chat access and if there are a lot of participants logged on, turn the chat off, after using it to provide basic access info (how to access captions, who to contact for tech/access problems, etc.).

Blind/low vision users as well as sighted viewers who just choose to participate by calling in will all require audio description of all panel slides, videos, etc. In addition, panel discussions should begin with a brief description of the presenters and the setting (or virtual background) in which they present. This need not be overly long, just something like "Emily Beitiks is a white woman in her mid-30s wearing a button up shirt and sweater vest. She sits in front of a bookcase in a blue room."

If the audience will have the opportunity to pose questions for the speaker(s), make sure to offer a secondary option to writing them in the Zoom Q&A or Chat box, such as emailing or texting them to the moderator (you can use a google phone number line if you don't want to publicly

share your number), so that phone participants or non-screen-reading blind people can enjoy this opportunity to be heard the same as everyone else.

If any programs are including film screenings or are highly visual in nature so that open audio description may not be possible, it is very easy to offer “opt-in” audio description on Zoom. Simply set up a second zoom session where you can play your audio description track or broadcast the live audio description and give your blind users the call in number for that zoom session. They can watch the film/program on Zoom and listen to the audio description simultaneously with ease.

5. Sensory-Input Disabilities

This category may refer to people on the autism spectrum, with learning disabilities, epilepsy, etc that may have a heightened sensitivity to what’s displayed on the video. For example, we recently screened a film that had a brief moment with a strobe light, and two of our participants, one with a vision impairment and one who is autistic, explained that in a theater that wouldn’t have been as big of a trigger, but because they were watching a few feet away from their laptop, it was deeply uncomfortable for them. Take extra caution to provide triggers for flashing lights, intense sounds or music, or any other intensified stimuli that may be troubling to some users, allowing them to black out their screens and/or mute until the stimuli is over.

6. Nonverbal Participation

Panelists who are nonverbal and use a communication device to speak should connect their communication device to the computer that they’ll sign onto zoom for, and select it’s input for the microphone. This will allow much clearer voicing than just picking up the synthetic voice through the computer microphone.

7. Preventing Ableism and Promoting Disability Justice

Protecting your program from Zoom Bombings and trolls who attempt to disrupt public events is part of planning accessible events to minimize the harm for your panelists or participants’ exposure to hurtful, discrimination and bigotry. Have a plan in place for whose job it is to monitor the chat and Q&A, and who can throw out disruptive participants. In addition, a disability justice approach entails thinking about preventing racist comments as well. For example, an interpreter shared a story with me where by guaranteeing event access, they allowed for a racist attack on her, as a woman of color:

Unfortunately, with the current shift to online service provision, many organizations are recording and publicly displaying the work of interpreters and others without our consent. I personally experienced this situation last Monday where the event was not only recorded and posted publicly without my consent, but also the event was ZoomBombed with racist and other offensive images. In an attempt to resolve the ZoomBomb issue, the organizers of that event chose to turn off all screens except for the interpreter screen, leaving my face, image, and work as the only visual reference for their large

audience to focus on. This experience was not only traumatizing for me, but also felt like a violation of my power and of my work as my intellectual property.

Interpreters have at times had their work scrutinized and ridiculed publicly, when their only intention was to provide communication access. This type of negative attention to our work can add undue stress to the interpreter as a person and can do harm to the interpreter's professional name. ASL interpreters of color, who are fewer in number in the field than are interpreters who are not of color, are at times faced with further scrutiny.

8. Managing Expectations

Many people are still very new to online programs and will enter with the expectation that they will have video and audio, and be able to participate actively in a way that isn't often possible for large public programs. Having someone available to help people understand this in the chat and Q&A as these issues come up will be very useful.

In addition, many users may have access problems that you cannot control - e.g. if their internet signal isn't strong, ASL will appear to be cutting in and out, when it's actually fine for your other users. Many guests will reach out to you with these complaints - make sure you have some means of quality control so you can check if it's a system-wide problem or just a problem for that user.

9. Competing Accommodations

As access for one group can create hurdles for others, keep in mind that you need to strive for balance with accommodations. For example, some participants may greatly benefit from the chat function as they'll be able to connect with other participants, whereas some blind users may prefer that the chat function is turned off. Or, Deaf participants will benefit from Spotighting just the interpreters' video, but other people have cognitive disabilities where they need to be able to see someone's face while they talk, benefiting most from Active Speaker View.