

Planning and Hosting Accessible Webinars

Tip Sheet No. 2
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Webinars are a great option for sharing information and providing training for those working to address domestic and sexual violence against people with disabilities. These types of virtual sessions are cost-effective, allowing you to host multiple trainings, thus reaching more people, and participants can join in without having to travel. Webinars are also an accessible means of reaching people with disabilities and Deaf people because they can attend from anywhere. However, to ensure that people with disabilities and Deaf people can fully engage and benefit from the content, you should consider several best practices for developing accessible webinars. This tip sheet addresses the key considerations for hosting accessible webinars, such as selecting your webinar platform, creating accessible webinar materials, working with your presenters to inform them about accessibility issues, and connecting with your participants to ensure that you meet their access needs.

Selecting a webinar platform

The accessibility of your webinars will always begin and end with the webinar platform you are using. If the program is not accessible or does not include certain integrated features, your ability to provide access will be limited. Before committing to a webinar platform, there are a few things that you should check to ensure that you will be able to provide access during your virtual events:

- › Is the platform compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act? You don't need to be a legal expert to determine if something is 508 compliant. Often, an Internet search can help you determine if the platform you are considering is accessible. Even if the provider's website says it is accessible, it is also recommended that you ask the provider directly. Most service representatives know what this is or should be able to find this information. If the company

Federal legal requirements

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act requires federal agencies and private entities receiving federal funds to make electronic and information technology

accessible to people with disabilities. This includes webinars and other virtual trainings.

can't answer your question or doesn't know about Section 508 compliance, this may point to an overarching lack of knowledge about accessibility, suggesting that they may not be able to provide the support you need.

- › Does the platform have an option to provide live, integrated captioning? A platform that has an option for live, integrated captioning is essential to providing access during your webinars. If the captioning is integrated, it places the written transcription in the same screen as the other webinar features, and in the direct line of sight for your participants. Some webinar platforms place the captioning on a separate screen, which requires toggling between two screens to know what is being said—a potential barrier to fully participating in the webinar.
- › Does the platform display its Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT)? The Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT) helps federal

contractors to assess commercial electronic and information technology products for accessibility. The template lists features and functions of a product that will identify if it is accessible. You can learn more about VPAT at <https://perma.cc/P7YK-U6QA>.

- › Other features of the platform that could help you to identify if it is Section 508 compliant include:
 - accessibility of all features of the program through keyboard shortcuts without the use of a mouse;
 - keyboard commands that allow the user to move between multiple windows on the computer;
 - the capacity to resize the captions, change the color of the text and the font, and the flexibility to move the captioning to different locations on the screen. Your participants may have individual access needs, and this allows them to adjust the captioning to meet their needs;

- nonauditory alerts to communicate with participants. Examples of these alerts could be an icon of a raised hand; a chat box to communicate with the webinar host; or white boards to write notes to all participants;
- the ability to record or save any materials, including captioning, for later review. This allows anyone to access the materials in the same format that it was delivered and at their own pace; and
- the option for screen-reader users to interact with all the program functions similarly to those who do not use screen readers. Examples include using polling or chat features, features specific for

presenters, and the ability to read across lines in the registration and other materials.

Registration

While it's important to design all aspects of your webinar for maximum access, you should also give participants an opportunity to request accommodations specific to their needs. Registration is a great opportunity to collect this information. In addition to asking for basic information—name, title, agency, contact information—be sure to ask about their access needs. Instead of providing an e-mail address for registrants to alert you to an accommodation request, ask about their accommodation needs during

Screen readers

A screen reader converts web content into speech so users can listen to the content appearing on the screen. While there are a number of different types of screen-reader programs, they are similar in their capabilities and the way they interact with web content. By reviewing a webinar platform for 508 compliance (using VPAT) you

can determine if the platform you are using is compatible with screen-reader programs. You can also learn more about how screen readers interact with web content through websites such as WebAIM (webaim.org/techniques/screenreader) and format your webinar content to interact with a screen reader.

registration. Below are some basic accommodations that participants may request for webinars:

- › **Closed captioning.** Even though you have prepared to offer captioning, it's always good to know which of your participants will be using it during the webinar. It will allow you to reach out to these people prior to the webinar and provide them with information about how captioning will work. Gathering this information at registration can often mitigate any confusion or need for troubleshooting during the webinar.
- › **Electronic copies of materials in advance.** Make sure that you finalize all webinar materials so that you can provide them to participants at least a week in advance. This allows those who have a support person to go over the materials in advance so they can clarify any confusing ideas or words. For example, people who are blind will have an opportunity to transfer the materials into braille so they can follow along, or use a screen reader to review the power point before the webinar so they don't have to rely on the presenter.
- › **Video relay services (VRS).** People who are Deaf or hard of hearing have various language needs. For many,

English is not their primary language. VRS enables people who are Deaf or hard of hearing who use American Sign Language to communicate with voice telephone users through video equipment.

- › **The “other” box.** Make sure you provide space for participants to provide information about access needs that are not included among the standard options in registration materials.



Tip!

Close registration no later than one week before the date of your webinar. This will help to ensure that you have enough time to fulfill any accommodation request you have not planned for and to work with your participants to meet their access needs. Also, set one registration deadline. A separate deadline for those who need accommodations is not in the spirit of creating an equal and inclusive experience for people with disabilities and Deaf people.

Once you have closed registration, reach out to people who have requested an accommodation. This is an opportunity for you to let them know that you have received their request and to provide additional information about logistics for the day of the webinar.

Selecting and preparing your captioner

Captioning is the process of transcribing the audio of a webinar into text so that participants can view it at the same time as words are being spoken. It offers an alternative to audio for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing and it may also be used by people with learning disabilities or other types of cognitive disabilities to enhance their engagement and understanding of the information provided. For these reasons, it is important that you provide accurate live, integrated captioning for every webinar.

While webinar platforms include features for live captioning, few provide captioning services. Thus, you will need to find a vendor to supply captioning services during your webinars.

Working with your captioner

Most industry standards state that you should be able to expect at least 98 percent accuracy in captioning. (<https://perma.cc/H9PQ-4PHE>.)

While you can expect the highest quality from your captioner, you can also support the captioner in delivering the highest quality services. In advance, send the captioner the webinar presentation, handouts, scripts, and a glossary of industry-specific terms that may be used during the webinar. This will increase the accuracy of the captioning.

Creating accessible webinar materials

Any of the materials you create to promote or distribute during your webinar should follow basic accessible design principles. Participants may print out these materials or read them on their computer. In developing your materials, you should use best practices for creating both electronic and print materials. Use sans serif fonts that are 14 points or larger. If any of your materials include graphics or photos, use Alt-text so that a screen reader can read them. There are

several additional considerations when you use presentation software such as PowerPoint. Using the established slide layouts will ensure that the reading order is correct for those using screen readers. If your presentation is going to be projected onto a large screen, consider increasing the font size. Use simple language and avoid putting large amounts of text on the slides. For more information on how to create accessible electronic and print materials, see our tip sheets on these topics in the resource list.



Tip!

Build in time. It is the best tool you have when planning for and providing access. When you are planning a webinar, build in extra time to meet accommodation requests, ensure that all your materials are accessible, and to prepare your presenters and others involved in hosting your event (captioners included!) to provide access.

Preparing your presenter for access

Now that you have prepared to provide access during your webinar, don't forget to prepare the presenting experts to do the same. Here are a few tips for your presenters:

- > Speak slowly and clearly. Make sure that your presenters know ahead of time that there will be someone captioning the webinar. They should speak at a moderate pace to support the captioner in providing high quality and accurate captions.
- > Provide descriptions. If there are images or graphics on the presentation slides, ask them to describe the content or image.
- > Use language everyone understands. If your presenters will be using any acronyms, abbreviations, or descriptive phrases, make sure that they explain what they mean. Because not everyone in the audience will know industry insider language, giving an explanation will prevent anyone from getting lost in the presentation.

Maintain access

Make sure that you maintain that accessibility throughout your webinar. Give your participants a way to communicate with you throughout the presentation, either through the use of a chat box or e-mail. If the webinar becomes inaccessible for someone

during the webinar, you won't know unless the person can alert you. If the issue persists, you may need to stop the webinar to fix the issue, or consider rescheduling until you can make the webinar accessible.

Archiving your webinars

Many of you may record your webinars and make them available after the live event. If you archive your webinars, you have to ensure that the recording is captioned. This is not only best practice, it is legally required. Many of the companies that do live real-time captioning also offer post-production services such as captioning. Additionally, you should ensure that any accompanying materials available during the live webinar also accompany the recording and are fully accessible.

Conclusion

Webinars are a great training tool for any organization. They are cost-effective and can reach a broad audience. By taking steps to make your webinars accessible, you open a door to sharing information and training with everyone, including people with disabilities.

Additional resources

U.S. Department of Justice, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) homepage

www.ada.gov

The ADA website provides information and technical assistance on the ADA.

ADA National Network

<http://adata.org>

The ADA National Network provides information, guidance, and training on the ADA available through 10 regional centers.

General Services Administration (GSA) Section508.gov

<https://perma.cc/RAT8-EUXB>

This website provides information about accessibility for all government agencies and contractors. Section 508 discusses VPAT and its uses.

Designing Accessible Events for People with Disabilities and Deaf Individuals

<https://perma.cc/ZSF3-YTJE>

Accessible webinar checklist

If you can answer yes to most of these statements, you are well on your way to hosting accessible webinars:

- › We use a webinar platform that includes an option to provide live integrated captioning during our webinar.
- › We use a webinar platform that users can control via keyboard commands with a mouse to allow them to interact with all features of the program.
- › We use a webinar platform that has alerts such as chat boxes and “raise your hand” features to communicate with participants.
- › We ask about accommodation needs and provide a list of common accommodations for participants to select from in our webinar registration process.
- › We close registration at least one week prior to our webinars so we can fulfill access requests.

Accessible webinar checklist (continued)

- › We review all of our PowerPoint presentations and other webinar materials to ensure that they are accessible and implement best practices for both print and electronic documents (for example, ensuring photos have Alt-text and that font sizes and color contrast are adequate).
- › We work with a captioning company that provides captions with at least a 98 percent accuracy rate and monitor captioning for accuracy.
- › We work with our presenters on accessibility, share best practices for accessibility with them, and help them ensure access during the webinar (for example, reminding them to speak slowly and describe visuals).
- › Our webinar recordings include real-time captioning and/or provide a transcript of the audio with the archived recording.

For more information

The Center on Victimization and Safety (CVS) at the Vera Institute of Justice works with communities around the country to fashion services that reach, appeal to, and benefit all victims. CVS's work focuses on communities of people who are at elevated risk of harm but often marginalized from victim services and the criminal justice system. We combine research, technical assistance, and the training to equip policymakers and practitioners with the information, skills, and resources needed to effectively serve

all victims. To learn more about CVS, contact cvs@vera.org.

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