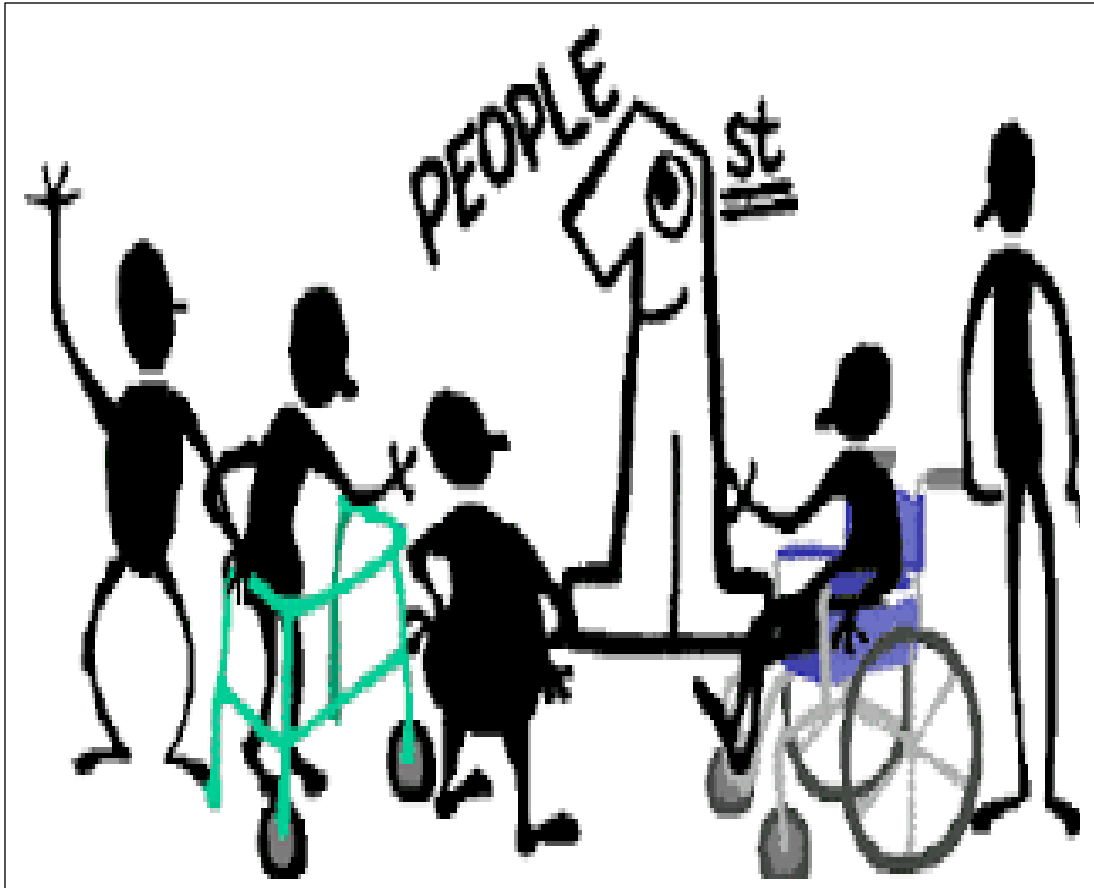


PLANNING Inclusive and Accessible Meetings



Human Resource Division-Talent Management Branch-
Reasonable Accommodation

OVERVIEW

Disability inclusion and diversity is more than hiring people with disabilities. It's about building a culture that welcomes and supports differences. In an inclusive workplace, people with disabilities are valued for their strengths and have the same opportunities to thrive. This commitment is reinforced by demonstrating that their inclusion is considered in all facets of our Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) organization.

Well-planned meetings are an essential communication tool for FNS to demonstrate that commitment. Successful meetings bring all employees together to actively share information, develop strategies, work toward common goals, and celebrate successes.

Given the amount of time, effort and resources spent on planning meetings, it makes good business sense to think of and organize meetings in a way that supports full participation. An area often overlooked by meeting planners, or dismissed as too difficult, is how to make the meeting accessible for people with disabilities. Planning fully accessible meetings and events might at first glance seem overwhelming, but with proper planning can become second nature.

This guide is based on a valued, inclusive approach to every FNS employee. We have chosen to highlight points of importance related to planning inclusive meetings for our employees with disabilities that will benefit all employees in attendance. The goal of this guide is to help planners learn to organize meetings that are inclusive and for this to become a permanent part of all meetings, no matter who attends.

Besides the obvious value to making meetings and events accessible there is a duty to do so that is reinforced through legislation, USDA, and FNS policies.

The goal for accessibility and inclusion is for people so, always remember that each event is a learning opportunity-feedback from your team or participants is the best method to learn how to fine tune your accessibility and inclusion methods. Your efforts will demonstrate your commitment to including all types of employees and people and will be appreciated.

The role of the HRD-Talent Management Branch-Reasonable Accommodations Coordinator (RAC):

The RAC is always a collaborative partner when planning and may serve as the accessibility point of contact for an event/presentation. However, the purpose of the guide is to empower the event coordinators with information to plan accessibility for meetings/events/presentations with the same consideration used to identify the facility or virtual platform (WebEx or Microsoft Teams).

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1. PLANNING THE MEETING

1.1 GENERAL

1.1a TIMING

When you plan a meeting/event, make sure you give participants the opportunity to identify their accommodation needs early in the process. You can do this in your initial notice or invitation, which will support an inclusive environment from the beginning of the planning and set the tone for the meeting.

Invite participants well before the meeting date so that you have time to arrange for appropriate accommodation requests. The earlier you receive accommodation requests, the easier it will be to keep expenses to a minimum—you will pay only for the services that you need, and you will avoid extra charges for last-minute requests. Arranging accommodations in advance is particularly important when the number of requests for a service could overload the availability of a single accommodation service provider.

When you plan, note the time tables below. If for a weekly or biweekly staff meeting the time frames are considerably less or resources can be made available on a reoccurring basis:

- Give participants enough time to arrange their transportation, attendant services and other personalized services.
- Request sign language interpreters and real-time captioning for people who are deaf or deafened and amplification systems for people who are hard of hearing about four (4) weeks in advance.
- Arrange for conversion of conventional print material to alternative formats such as Braille, DAISY, audio, large print or plain language and offer them before the meeting about three (3) weeks from the meeting date.
- Provide presenters, about six (6) weeks out from the scheduled date, with presentation tips to ensure adequate time for preparation and submission of their presentation package back to you for publication in alternative formats.
- Provide meeting materials in advance for those who need more time or quiet to gain better comprehension.
- Prepare agenda with adequate meal and health breaks, if guide dogs are present, provide longer breaks for people with guide animals.

1.1b. BUDGET FOR ACCESSIBILITY

It is important to include accommodation costs in your planning. Your initial budget should allow for potential costs of accommodation services or products that you might need. Some of the items you budget for may not be needed or affordable, but starting the process with a firm idea of possible costs is an important step for any successful meeting. Estimating costs for services can be difficult, since they vary, based on time, location, availability of service providers and the type of service

required. Costs for alternative formats will also depend on the time allowed for completing the work. It is important that you call service providers as early as possible and get estimates based on your actual needs. Contact your Regional Administrative Officers (AOs) for possible contracts for service providers. If in the National Office, contact the Human Resource Division, Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator.

1.1c. REGISTRATION AND PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

The words you choose will matter, so set the tone of acceptance early and clearly. A person is not their disability and not all disabilities are seen; emphasize the person first by referring to attendees as an employee with a disability rather than a “disabled employee”.

There is no single way to provide accessibility, and the type of need may differ among persons with the same condition. It is often necessary to explore access alternatives and to consult with the individual who needs access to determine how best to accommodate for a specific circumstance. Registration provides you an opportunity to get to know the needs of your attendees in advance. An example Registration form is located at Appendix #. An additional consideration is designating one person as the point of contact for accessibility requests. This will assist in processing requests in a timely and confidential manner.

Invitations to your meeting/event are predominantly sent via email and/or posted to social media platforms, and the FNS Intranet site. While email invitations may have multiple graphical elements, ensure that images and logos have alt text – image descriptions – for people who are blind and use screen readers. In addition, it is best practice to have an option for someone to click through to a plain text version of the invite for individuals with a variety of disabilities. Tips and “how tos” are located on the FNS Intranet site by typing in the search box, “accessibility”.

Promoting the event includes announcements on your website or the FNS intranet page. Ensure that a link is included and this linked page will include the information relevant to employees with disabilities. The USDA Accessibility Team and the FNS Office of Information Technology [Pages - OIT Home \(usda.net\)](#) can assist you with accessibility questions.

1.1c (1). PROMOTIONAL AND REGISTRATION MATERIALS CHECKLIST

- Provide alternative registration options (online, telephone, text, email).
- Include a statement that meeting/event is accessible and presentations are offered in alternative formats upon request.
- Include a request for accommodations statement.
- Inquire about personal care attendants and service animals.
- Select a “point person” for accessibility issues and list as contact on all materials and the website.

- Ensure that your website and mobile apps are accessible.
- Include an accessibility link for meeting/event on your website in a prominent place.
- Identify any barriers that cannot be eliminated and ways they have been mitigated.
- Offer materials in alternative formats (e.g., Braille, large font, electronic).
- Ensure that fonts used are sans serif (Arial, Helvetica, Proxima Nova, Futura, and Calibr).

1.1d. STAFF/VOLUNTEERS

If the meeting/event is large enough you may want to consider having staff or volunteers designated to assist participants with accessibility needs. Specific considerations, are having someone greet the interpreters, IT specialists who can address connectivity, closed captioning issues, seating, maintaining clear pathways, or even having information related to restrooms, breakout areas, first aid, etc.

Volunteers and staff will need training in disability etiquette prior to the event and the FNS RAC should be able to assist.

1.1d. (1) STAFF AND VOLUNTEER TRAINING CHECKLIST

- Create a plan for accessibility problems that may arise during the event.
- Contact FNS RAC for assistance with disability etiquette training.
- Train staff/volunteers about accommodations, use of assistive devices, emergency procedures, and accessibility features of the venue and meeting/event.
- Hold orientation for attendees with disabilities to review accessibility features, location of meetings/events, and accommodations.
- Do a walk-through with Staff and Volunteers of the venue a few days before and on the day of the meeting/event.
- Test all technical equipment when it arrives and on the day of the meeting/event.
- Ensure that staff and volunteers are clearly visible through their uniform, signage, or other notable features.

1.2 CHOOSING THE VENUE

Wherever you plan to hold your meeting, it is important to do a thorough check of the physical site before booking the location. While facility owners or managers often promote their sites as accessible, interpretations of accessibility vary. An accessible entrance does not necessarily mean access throughout the facility. Visit the site to assess whether a facility will meet the needs of all participants.

The checklists provided are not exhaustive and can expand according to meeting/venue type and/or participant needs.

1.2a. VENUE EXTERIOR CHECKLIST

General

- Close proximity of venue from airport, train and bus stations, paratransit services, and public transportation.
- Close proximity of venue to accessible hotels, restaurants, theatres, shops, and other attractions.
- Barrier-free/step-free paths of travel.
- Slip-resistant, level surfaces.
- Tactile ground surface indicators that signal stairs and ramps for people who are blind or have visual impairments.
- Stairs with continuous handrails on both sides; no open risers (space between steps).
- Ramps for inaccessible areas, with handrails on both sides if the rise is greater than 6 inches, and level landings.
- Curb ramps/cuts for persons who use mobility aids or devices.
- Crosswalks with visual and audible signals.
- Toileting, watering, and walking areas for service animals

Entrance

- Barrier and step-free, clearly marked (Braille and tactile signage), well-lit, slip-resistant accessible main entrance at street level so that all individuals can use this entrance.
- Direct access from the main entrance to the lobby, main floor, and elevators.
- Clearly marked (Braille and tactile signage), covered drop-off and pick-up points adjacent to the main entrance, with curb cuts.

- Alternative accessible entrances used during same hours as main entrance.
- Signs (Braille and tactile) indicating location of accessible entrances.
- Entrance connected by an accessible route to public transportation stops, accessible parking and passenger loading zones, and public streets or sidewalks.
- Other entrances that are at street level or accessible by ramps or lifts.

Doors

- Main entrance/exit doorways that are wide enough (32 inches with the door open 90 degrees) to accommodate mobility devices and aids.
- Easy-to-open (automatic/push button door openers, lever handles), operable with one hand, within reach for mobility device users, lightweight (no more than 5 pounds) doors; no revolving doors.
- Glass doors with contrasting door frames, stickers, or bright signs
Parking/Transit.
- Accessible, clearly marked (symbol of accessibility) parking spaces (at least 1 handicap space for every 25 total spaces) located on the shortest accessible route of travel from adjacent parking to an accessible entrance.
- Accessible transit services (private and public).
- Available paratransit services.

1.2b. VENUE INTERIOR CHECKLIST

General

- Well-lit areas; adjustable lighting.
- Even, stable, regular, slip-resistant, non-sloped paths of travel.
- Sufficiently wide (64 inches for two-way traffic), barrier-free hallways and corridors to allow everyone to move about freely.
- Securely attached edges of carpets or mats.
- Clearly marked (Braille and tactile signage) accessible exits.
- Clearly marked (Braille and tactile signage) accessible restrooms located on an accessible route.
- Video screens with closed-captioning.

- Registration/concierge at a height accessible by mobility device users that allows for a frontal approach and provides adequate knee clearance.
- Emergency procedures for persons with disabilities (audio and visual alarms in halls).
- Venue free of strong smells (perfume, cleaning agents, etc.), loud noises, and flashing/bright lights.
- Designated quiet rooms with no talking, no noise, low light, and no flashing lights, images, or objects.

Doors/Elevators

- Easy-to-open, lightweight (no more than 5 pounds) doors with lever handles that are easy to grasp with one hand or automatic/push button openers.
- Wide (32 inches with the door open 90 degrees) doorways for mobility devices to enter/exit.
- Clearly marked (Braille and tactile signage) elevators along an accessible route.
- Elevator doors that reopen automatically when obstructed by an object or person.
- Elevator interiors adequately illuminated and wide enough for wheelchairs/scooters/mobility devices to enter, maneuver within reach of controls, and exit.
- Elevator call buttons with visual and audible signals, reachable by mobility device users.
- Elevator control buttons that are designated by Braille and tactile characters or symbols and are reachable by wheelchair/scooter/mobility device users.
- Elevator voice and visual display two-way emergency communication.

1.2c. MEETING/EVENT ROOM

Maximizing on the accessibility of your meeting room space will promote the full participation of all the attendees. There are several potential layouts to use for setting up the speakers' platform and for the participants. The Americans with Disability Act Hospitality website offers multiple configurations to consider for the speakers and the participants. Previewing these in advance will help you select the type of meeting room you select for your meeting or event. See <https://www.adahospitality.org/accessible-meetings-events-conferences-guide/book>.

1.2c (1) MEETING/EVENT ROOM CHECKLIST

General

- Barrier-free, slip-resistant path to rooms.
- Proper air circulation with temperature controls.
- Rooms large enough to allow all persons to move about freely.
- Clearly marked (Braille and tactile signage) accessible restrooms located on an accessible route in close proximity to rooms.
- Elevators in close proximity to rooms and along an accessible route.
- Doors wide enough (32 inches with door open 90 degrees) for mobility devices to enter/exit and maneuver.
- Doors propped open at start and end of each session, with attendants or automatic mechanism to open the doors during session.
- Multiple sets of power outlets for laptops and other electronics.
- Well-secured, covered cables, wires, cords, and microphones placed outside of paths of travel, duct tape works well for this if the venue location doesn't have other methods.
- Tables for materials and food/beverage at a height (28 to 34 inches) reachable by mobility device users and in an accessible location.
- Quiet rooms in close proximity to rooms, cell-phone free space.
- Space for service animals.

Visual

- Signs (with Braille and tactile characters, sans serif or simple serif large type fonts, sentence case, and good contrast) that direct attendees to all rooms.
- Mounted signs designating permanent rooms and spaces with tactile characters that contrast with their backgrounds and Braille.
- Well-lit rooms and adjacent areas.

Auditory

- Good acoustics and a functioning auxiliary sound system.
- Public address (PA) system.

- Location of all audio/visual equipment in an area that does not block paths of travel.
- Assistive listening devices, hearing or induction loops, and Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) for attendees who have impaired hearing.
- Prominent, well-lit, visible space for interpreters to stand (e.g., raised platform with a dark, solid color background).
- Clear lines of sight to interpreters and real-time CART.

1.2d. SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

A safe venue and safety plan for emergencies is critical for all meetings but accessibility needs can sometimes require additional planning. All participants need to know how to evacuate safely if an emergency occurs. Discuss evacuation plans and procedures with the facilities manager and FNS Occupational Safety and Health Manager in the early planning stages.

Invite meeting participants to identify, in advance, their particular evacuation needs when they confirm attendance. Provide the facilities manager with a list of participants who will need assistance if there is an emergency evacuation. Plan to help make a possible evacuation quick and efficient, by arranging for volunteers to help people who have identified a need for assistance.

At the beginning of the meeting, tell participants where the nearest emergency exits are located.

1.3 PRESENTATIONS:

We have already discussed planning for where the presenters are located in the meeting area, now let's talk about preparing the presenters in advance to ensure that their presentations and meeting materials are available for producing in alternative formats for employees with accessibility needs. ADA Hospitality offers additional tips for presenters at <https://www.adahospitality.org/accessible-meetings-events-conferences-guide/book>

1.3a: Meeting Materials

All attendees must have access to the materials for the presentations so they can full participate. Producing material in alternative formats could be as simple as removing specialized formatting; saving as a text file (.txt) rather than a Word format (.doc); or saving the document in a separate file to be transferred to CD, DVD, or downloaded from the Web. Always check with the person who made the request about the format needed. If necessary, these materials may be offered in alternative formats (printed large font, braille, audio recording, etc.). All electronic materials should be produced in accessible mainstream file formats such as MS Word, HTML, or PDF so that the content can be readily accessed. Important note: Not all PDF files are accessible, especially those created via copying or scanning a printed page into a PDF format.

1.3a (1) Meeting Materials Checklist

Although some participants may have the same or similar disability, do not assume that they will request the same accommodation. Accommodations are unique to each person and dependent on a variety of factors.

- Written materials are easiest to read when printed using a sans serif font in high-contrast colors. Sans serif fonts are types that do not have serifs, which are the little extra strokes that often look like tails found at the start and end of the letter. The most widely used serif font is Times New Roman. Examples of sans serif fonts are Arial, Helvetica, Verdana, Futura, Univers and Franklin Gothic.
- Some people may have disabilities that make it difficult or impossible for them to read printed material. This includes people who are blind or have a visual impairment; it also includes people with learning disabilities and may include some people with mobility disabilities. These participants may require materials in alternative formats and may identify themselves as having a print disability.
- Employees with a visual impairment may need your meeting materials in Braille, diskette, CD, DVD, flash drive, digital talking books, etc. This is ascertained by asking the meeting participants the format for printed materials that will assist them.
- Put conference materials in binders for easy page turning and note taking.

PowerPoint Presentations and Slide Decks

- Describe the content of graphic slides orally during your presentation.
- Limit the information on each screen/slide so it is easily read from the back of the room.
- Have sufficient text descriptions (alt text) of graphs and tables for presentations posted online or sent digitally.
- Use of multimedia video should be captioned.
- Use the PowerPoint default font of 44-point bold font for headings.
- Use 32-point font or higher for short, simple bullets.
- Include no more than six lines of text on each slide.
- The outline view should contain all the text.

1.3b: Presenters: Note that the presenters themselves may also have disabilities. In fact, diversity should be a factor to consider when selecting presenters. Ask each presenter well in advance whether he or she requires an accommodation.

General

- Announce when the meeting begins and ends.

- Build multiple breaks into the schedule, preferably 5-10 minutes every hour.
- Avoid the use of flashing lights and loud sounds.
- Ensure that the presentation area and screens are viewable from all areas of the room.
- Allow space for interpreters.
- For large events, allow people with relevant disabilities to enter the room and find seats before the general audience.
- Provide all materials (papers, PowerPoints, agendas, slides) in alternative formats (e.g., large print, Braille, electronic, audio CDs, etc.) and in advance of the meeting/event.
- Make electronic versions of materials available in plain text, rich text, or Microsoft Word formats and post on the website.
- Make materials available in advance to interpreters and other support personnel to familiarize themselves with the materials and ask any questions Structure.
- At the start of the meeting, introduce the interpreter(s) and other service providers.
- At the start of the meeting, orally describe the room layout and location of restrooms, emergency exits, break rooms, and food/beverages.
- Provide an overview of the presentation at the start and a summary of the key points at the end.
- Build in sufficient time for attendees to get from session to session.
- Allow for regular breaks (about every hour) for attendees, service animals, and access service providers such as interpreters, CART providers, note takers, and readers.

Presenter

- Always face the audience; never turn away.
- Use a microphone.
- Keep hands and other objects away from your mouth when speaking.
- If interpreters are being used, do not walk while speaking.
- Be visible to everyone; stand in good light.

- Do not stand in front of a window or bright screen in order to avoid the silhouette effect.
- Speak in well-modulated tones and at a pace that allows interpreters to interpret accurately.
- Keep the presentation clear, simple, concise, and organized.
- Use simple language; avoid acronyms, jargon, and idioms Give attendees enough time to process information by pausing between topics.
- Use multiple communication methods to accommodate different learning styles (verbal information, pictures and diagrams, text, auditory).
- Check in with attendees to ensure that presentation is understood and clarify if needed.
- Avoid using gestures and visual points of reference.
- When reading directly from text, provide an advance copy in print and digital format and pause slightly when interjecting information not in the text.
- Describe verbally all visual materials (e.g., slides, charts, PowerPoints, etc.).
- Provide captioning for all videos.
- Provide CART for all sessions.

2. CONDUCTING THE MEETING

- Advise all participants of the services available (e.g., sign language interpretation, attendant care, note taking, captioning) at the start of the meeting.
- Ask attendants to identify themselves at the beginning of the meeting for anyone requiring assistance.
- Ask participants to identify themselves each time they speak for the benefit of participants who have a visual impairment.
- Inform participants of the nearest emergency exits and accessible restroom facilities.
- If the meeting room is physically large, make sure that an audio system is installed and that all participants use the microphones provided.
- Encourage all presenters to speak clearly and at a moderate pace to make the information easier to understand and communication easier for interpreters, interveners, note takers and captionists.

- Some people take longer to express ideas than others; allow time for people to respond at their own speed.
- Briefly describe the content of the agenda and handout materials.
- Clearly indicate changes in topics, health breaks and adjournments during the meeting.
- Advise participants to minimize interruptions. Interpreters, interveners, captionists and note takers need to concentrate.
- Advise participants that interpreters will say everything that is signed, and sign everything that is said. Interpreters will not add words, edit or censor a conversation.
- Remind participants that the event is scent-free.
- During question and answer periods, remind people to speak slowly and clearly and state their name before beginning.

3. CLOSING THE MEETING

All meetings and events should include a survey for attendees to provide their feedback. To determine how you did in terms of accessibility, include an accessibility question in the survey. Have the survey sheet location available on the event website or if a smaller meeting ask participants to send feedback to the meeting coordinator. Remind the participants that the responses will allow planners to examine ways to both increase and improve the accessibility of future meetings and events. If you use a rating survey ensure, as with the training, it has accessibility considerations built into it and that if a rating is offered that the participant have a chance to explain the rating.

4. VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Below are some best practices you can implement to ensure that your events are accessible.

- Include a statement on your website, registration, and all other communications that asks attendees to specify their accessibility/accommodations needs, gives a deadline for requests, and provides the name, email address, and phone number of the individual to contact.
- List in all event communications accessibility/accommodations that you will provide without the need for attendees having to request, such as captioning.
- Provide materials that help orient participants to your chosen platform. Offer practice sessions in advance of the main event.
- On Microsoft Teams, screen readers read aloud the comments in chat, distracting screen reader users from hearing the conversation effectively. As a result, use the chat feature sparingly; do not use the chat function; or designate a person who everyone privately messages, and have that person read the chats aloud and keep

a record of URLs posted in chat and save the chat to make it available to users after the meeting.

- Consider your audience and language level. Use plain language when appropriate.
- Have a staff person monitor the chat or Q&A function for accessibility issues that may arise during the event.
- Advise everyone orally and in the chat or Q&A function about the accessibility features/accommodations being offered and how to use them at the start of the event. Invite attendees to raise access concerns during the event and instruct them how to do this without disrupting the meeting.
- Offer the option for people using chat and/or Q&A functions to have their messages read aloud.
- Offer different ways that individuals can access the event, including via Internet and telephone.
- Provide all materials and PowerPoint slides in an electronic format, share via email or the chat function, post on a website before the event, and create a short URL.
- Announce at the start of the event how to access copies of materials and share the link on the presentation's first page and in the chat/Q&A function, and read it aloud.
- Provide CART (real-time captioning) for all events even if the virtual platform generates automatic captions, as these are often unreliable. Captioning creates a transcript of the event that can be used by everyone, including those who attend the live event.
- Describe all images and videos for blind/visually impaired individuals, as well as for those joining by phone.
- Sharing your screen is not accessible for blind persons, so send or post materials electronically on a web page in advance of the event. On the day of the event, provide a link to the materials in the Q&A or chat function and add a visual description.
- Sharing a video is not accessible for blind and/or deaf and hard of hearing persons. Ensure that the video is captioned and also describe what is happening during the event.
- Try to schedule your event so as not to go beyond two hours.
- Allow people to turn off self-view if it is distracting to them.
- Have the event host only show the person presenting, along with the active ASL interpreter.
- Advise attendees to stay in gallery view so they can see all presenters and the ASL interpreters at the same time.

- Avoid loud and distracting noises. Encourage all attendees to stay muted when not speaking.
- Avoid flashing or strobing animations in presentation or other materials.
- For people who read lips, ensure that presenters have their camera on and are well lit.
- Ensure that the environment behind presenters is not distracting. If it is, use a virtual background, but note that some can wash out faces.
- Eliminate background noise by muting everyone except for the person speaking.
- Some apps can help reduce background noise on calls, such as Krisp.
- Allow only one person to speak at a time. This will also help the captioner(s) and ASL interpreter(s) more accurately interpret.
- Have each person say their name each time they speak.
- Ensure that any voting, polling, or other forms of participation are accessible. Provide alternatives ways for attendees to participate.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 5.1 - DISABILITY ETTIQUETTE CONSIDERATIONS

Communicating with individuals with disabilities should be no different than the same respectful, clear communication deserved by everyone. This is especially important to remember, given that the majority of disabilities are “hidden” or “invisible,” i.e., not obvious. Here are some general guidelines offered by the American Bar Association (ABA). A link to their complete guide is located in Appendix 5.5 “Resources”.

Every Person

- Treat the person with the same respect that you extend to every person.
- Focus on the person, not his or her disability.
- Ask each person what will make him or her most comfortable.
- Always ask the person if he or she needs assistance and how you can assist; do not assume he or she needs help.
- Do not make decisions for the person.
- Address the person directly rather than the sign language interpreter, reader, or other access provider.

Persons Who Use Wheelchairs/Scooters

- When speaking for more than a few minutes, bend to eye level or pull up a chair.
- Never lean on, push, move, or touch the mobility device.

Persons Who Are Blind or Have Visual Impairments

- Introduce yourself and others if present.
- Ask the person his or her name.
- Identify your job or role.
- Be descriptive when giving directions.
- Avoid using visually-oriented references.
- Do not pet or distract service animals.
- Walk on the opposite side of the service animal.
- Offer your arm if person needs to be guided.
- Describe where you are going and any obstacles if you are serving as a guide.
- With permission, guide the person’s hand to the back of a chair if you offer someone a seat.
- Let the person know when you are leaving.
- Find a place with good lighting, but not too bright.

Persons Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Ask the person how he or she prefers to communicate (e.g., sign language, gesturing, writing, or speaking).
- Advise the person if you have trouble understanding the person.
- Face the person when talking.
- Find a well-lit room, but avoid glare.
- Speak clearly, avoiding gum chewing or obscuring your mouth with your hand.
- Use your normal tone of voice and volume.
- Avoid spaces with background noise.
- Have pen or paper or device to text on hand as alternative communication method.
- In groups, request that people speak one at a time.
- Address the person rather than his or her interpreter.
- When communicating with a person who reads lips, speak clearly in a normal way that does not over exaggerate words, use short and simple sentences, avoid blocking your face, and stand in a well-lit place.
- Ensure that the venue has an induction loop that stops background noise interfering if the person is wearing a hearing aid.
- Ask, if you have any doubts, if the person understood you.
- Do not pretend to understand when you do not.
- Be aware of situations involving announcements or calling out names so you can notify persons who are deaf or have other hearing impairments.

Persons with Speech Difficulties

- Ask each person what will make him or her most comfortable.
- Listen carefully.
- Do not pretend to understand when you do not.
- Give the person your full attention.
- Find a quiet space.
- If you do not understand, ask the person to repeat; if you still are unable to understand, ask the person to write the information or to recommend an alternative method of communicating.
- Do not finish sentences for the person or interrupt.
- Consider writing as an alternative means of communicating.

Persons with Learning/Cognitive Difficulties

- Ask each person what will make him or her most comfortable.
- Listen carefully.
- Speak clearly.
- Check for understanding.
- Use clear, concrete language, avoiding abstractions.
- Allow the person extra time to process the information and ask questions.
- Ask the person how he or she prefers to communicate (e.g., written or verbal).
- Don't overload the person with too much information.
- Find a quiet place without distractions.

Persons with Developmental Disabilities

- Ask each person what will make him or her most comfortable.
- Speak clearly.
- Use simple words and concrete, not abstract, concepts.
- Break down complex concepts into small parts.
- Do not use “baby” talk.
- Ask neutral questions.
- Verify responses by repeating questions in a different way.
- Allow time for decision-making.
- Keep to the person’s schedule and routine.
- Model your pace of speech and vocabulary on that of the person.
- If you are not sure if the person understood you, ask him or her to repeat the information for your benefit.

Persons with Psychosocial Conditions

- Ask if there is a preferred time to communicate.
- Schedule communications in the late morning or early afternoon.
- Keep the pressure of the situation to a minimum.
- Use automated reminders to highlight times and locations of meetings.
- Provide written instructions.
- Allow for breaks.

APPENDIX 5.2-SAMPLE EVENT REGISTRATION FORM LANGUAGE

On-site Meeting/Event

“If you require documents in formats other than conventional print, or if you have specific accommodation or dietary needs, please let us know so we can make arrangements in advance. Please also identify any assistance you may require in the event of an emergency evacuation. For more detailed information, call STAFF POC at (507) XXX-XXXX or first.last@usda.gov.”

“Please indicate your requirements to help us plan an event that meets your accommodation and inclusion needs. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact STAFF POC at (507) XXX-XXXX or first.last@usda.gov.”

Virtual Meeting/Event

“We welcome employees with disabilities. For questions about accessibility or to request an accommodation to participate in this event, we ask that the National Capital Region employees contact the Reasonable Accommodations Coordinator, Sheila Kopczynski at 208-202-2811 or sheila.kopczynski@usda.gov or FNS.HRD.ReasonableAccommodations@usda.gov.

For employees outside the National Capital Region, please contact your immediate supervisor. Requests should be made by DATE (usually 4-2 weeks prior to the event) to ensure that the accessibility options are available when the event takes place.”

APPENDIX 5.3- PLANNING A VIRTUAL EVENT CHECKLIST

Pre-Plan:

If all participants have internet access, what other technology might attendees need to fully participate? You find out by asking the attendees in advance if accessibility features are needed, i.e. interpreters, closed captioning, someone to “talk the text”, etc.

Have you explored the platforms you are using i.e. Microsoft Teams or WebEx to see what built in features are already in place and how to use them? The USDA 508 Compliance Team can assist you in understanding the accessibility platform tools and how to use them.

Consult with the FNS-Team of Disabilities for ideas to consider when planning a virtual event. Specifically ask for employee volunteers with qualified disabilities to help in the planning stage of the event to identify areas for accessibility tools.

Planning the format or agenda of the event:

- Build in 10-minute breaks each hour or so for employees to process what was presented and to accommodate personal needs for themselves or their Service Animals.
- Event organizers “create a tip sheet for the Microsoft Teams or WebEx platforms with directions that include step-by-step information about how to use Microsoft Teams and the option to attend training sessions about Microsoft Teams or WebEx platforms before the event.
- If possible build in time for participants to contact you or a designated staff member far enough in advance to request specific accessibility needs
- Factor the costs for closed captioning, sign language interpretation, and other potential accommodations into your budget.
- Make sure your meeting and presentation materials are;
 - Compatible with screen readers,
 - Have computer based audio listening/speaking and phone-based audio listening/speaking.
- Ask if anyone needs the materials provided in written accessible format far enough in advance to send them prior to the event. Invite them to send any questions they have to the point of contact prior to the event. These can be shared with the presenters to ensure they are addressed during the session.
- Have an accessibility point of contact who can assist with troubleshooting or access issues and provide contact information for them at the start of the session.

- Make sure all participants have the links or login codes needed to join.

Virtual Presentations:

- Ensure fonts are easy to read and text is large and has good color contrast.
- Be mindful of jargon, slang, and assumed knowledge to be inclusive of all attendees.
- Use plain language; communicate your audience can understand the first time they read or hear it.
- If images are used ensure there is alternative text and image descriptions.
- Ensure your slides are uncluttered and color contrasted to assist screen readers and participants with limited vision.
- Do not use strobing or flashing animations in a presentation.

Specific Accessibility Considerations.

People Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing or Have Sensory Disabilities

- Make sure your audio is clear; poor audio quality can make it hard for people to access the event.
- Have your speakers use a headset whenever possible if this is accessible to them to improve audio.
- Hosts and presenters should use a quiet room where they won't be disturbed whenever possible.
- Mute all attendees but those speaking to keep background noise to a minimum so that attendees can easily hear.
- Ask people speaking to say their name every time they speak, so captioners and attendees alike all know who is talking.

Access for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired or Have Sensory Disabilities

- 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.
- Describe live scenarios. For example, if you are presenting a live video tutorial of applying makeup, you could describe the process: "I am now applying a dark purple lipstick to my upper lip."

- Describe any images, read any text that appears on screen, and describe anything that you gesture at as if you were explaining it to someone who isn't in the same room as you.

Access for People Who Are Intellectually or Developmentally Disabled

- Be patient with your attendees when you're explaining how to use online platforms, especially if they are new to the platform and haven't used it before. Repeat information if necessary.
- Use accessible, plain language during the event and avoid using jargon.
- Build processing time/breaks into your event.
- Leave ample time for questions.

Post virtual event

- Share materials in an accessible format.
- Offer your attendees the opportunity to provide feedback about the event, including accessibility, to help you prepare to plan the next one.
- Make accessibility an ongoing, inclusive conversation in your community for all types of events.

APPENDIX 5.4- TIPS FOR PRESENTERS

It is crucial that planners communicate with all speakers/presenters well in advance to ensure that their presentations and materials will be accessible for persons with a wide range of disabilities. Emphasize that there is not a one-size-fits-all accommodation, and that persons with the same disabilities may have different needs. Ask presenters to submit their materials about a month before the meeting or event in order to allow enough time to produce alternative formats, and to provide the materials to interpreters and other service providers and participants.

Prepare, well in advance, an accessibility checklist. We have provided a sample checklist on the next page. Schedule a briefing session with the presenters to go over the items on your checklist. Set out your expectations from the start.

- Adhere to a planned schedule.
- Work with the meeting organizer to make arrangements to produce handout materials in alternative formats, such as Braille, DAISY, audio, large print, diskette, CD, DVD or flash drives. If alternative formats are not available at the meeting, send them as soon as possible. Make sure you ask specifically what type of format the participant requires.
- Try to provide conventional print and electronic handouts to the meeting organizer well before the event so that other formats can be produced and distributed before the meeting.
- Prepare audiovisual aids using at least 18-point sans serif fonts—such as Arial or Verdana—with high-contrast colors (black type on a white background is best). For more information on sans serif fonts, see section 4 on page 15.
- Ensure that video material is captioned for participants who are deaf, deafened and hard of hearing. Provide descriptive narration format for people who are blind or have a visual impairment (particularly for charts and graphs).
- Speak clearly and at a moderate pace. Be sure to face the audience during the presentation.
- Periodically check with the audience to see if the message and presentation material are understood. Clarify as needed.
- Allow adequate time for people who are deaf, deafened and hard of hearing to process on-screen messages and for the interpreters to communicate the spoken word through sign language.
- Use plain language and presentation materials that are crisp, to the point and concise. Slide presentations that are too busy can cause information overload.
- During question and answer periods, remind people to speak slowly and clearly and state their name before beginning.

APPENDIX 5.5 – Closed Captioning Options for WebEx and Microsoft Teams Platforms

WebEx

You are planning your event that includes a virtual audience component and your platform is WebEx by Cisco. The closed captioning for these events are provided using CART services. For FNS events these may be requested using the Federal Relay Closed Captioning Service (FEDRCC).

1. Go to www.fedrcc.us
2. Fill out the form with your agency and webinar information. See example below.

Contact Information

First Name *

John

Last Name *

Doe

Email Address (Required) *

john.doe@fns.usda.gov

Enter only one email address. Note: only emails ending with .mil , .gov , gallaudet.edu , redcross.org, si.edu or .fed.us will be accepted.

I understand that Relay Conference Captioning is intended for participating in conference calls, webinars or multiparty calls. * Check

I certify I am requesting RCC for myself or participants who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing in order to participate on a conference call, webinar or multiparty call. * Check

Phone Number *

XXX-XXX-XXXX

Alternative contact information

Add email or phone number

Event Information

Teleconference Phone Number *

415-527-5035

If you are using a VoIP (Voice over IP) provider for a Web Conference, enter 000-000-0000 as the Teleconference phone number and include the VOIP information in the Event Details. A web conference URL is needed to Book the Event. If you are not using VoIP, a Teleconference number is required.

Access Code

Web Conference URL (Optional)

Past WebEx Meeting Link here

[What's this](#)

Event Title or Subject Matter *

WebEx Meeting Title

Federal Agency Name (Required) *

(1230) Food and Nutrition Service (USDA)

Note: You can only select the agency name that closely matches your email address. [Can't find your agency name or don't know billing code?](#)

Event Notes

Enter remarks here, i.e:

"Join the WebEx Audio by selecting the "Call Me" option

Date and Time of Event

Date of Event *

2019-02-27

E.g., 2019-02-11

Begin Time *

: am pm

End Time (Estimated) *

: am pm

Time Zone

Language

- English
- Spanish

Transcript Option (unedited realtime transcript) *

- Retain copy of the transcript on server
- Destroy transcript after event to protect my confidentiality

Participant Options *

- Allow participants to view transcript
- Allow participants to view & save transcript
- Participants cannot view or save transcript when call has ended

*SSL Encryption included on all scheduled events.

Disclaimer: FedRCC has no control on the quality of the audio connection being used for the requested call as audio quality affects the accuracy of the call being transcribed. Requestor is responsible to ensure best audio connectivity is available at all times during the call. Preliminary information on the content, agenda or PowerPoint being used for the call should be provided to rcc@sprint.com as it would be helpful for the captioner in order to provide a more accurate transcription of the call. FedRCC is not to be used for any non-telephone calls/meetings at any time. Transcripts provided at the end of a call are unedited/raw data.

Submit

Cancel

Transcripts options are based on individual requirements.

There will be a confirmation email sent from cc@captionedtext.com. If, the request is to be cancelled, reply to that email to request cancellation. Forward the captioning link to employees who can log into the site, or the URL can be added to the Multimedia Player in WebEx.

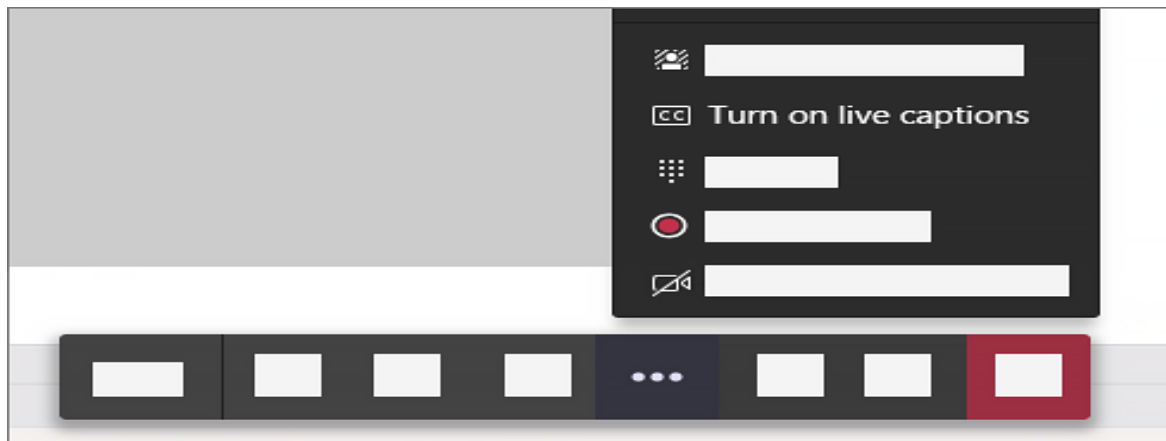
3. **Work with the captioning company to test before your first time.**
4. **End of Meeting:** Once the meeting has ended, scroll to the bottom of the Transcript Screen and save the document with the name of your choice.

Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams may be used for a staff meeting or a larger event. The participants have the option of activating the closed captions feature.

To turn captions on and off

To use live captions in a meeting, go to your meeting controls and select **More options** ******* > **Turn on live captions**.



Tips to help ensure that live captions are as accurate as possible, try these steps:

- Speak clearly, slowly, and directly into the mic. As your distance from the mic increases, captions may become less accurate.
- Avoid locations with background noise.
- Avoid having multiple people speak at the same time.

APPENDIX 5.6 – RESOURCES

- **The Employees on your team who need assistive technology/services will know what will help them access the event and feel included.**
- **FNS Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator**
Office: (208)-202-2811, Sheila.kopczynski@usda.gov or FNS.HRD.ReasonableAccommodations@usda.gov
- **USDA Accessibility Website**
[Accessibility Plays | USDA](#)
- **ADA Hospitality Website**
<https://www.adahospitality.org/accessible-meetings-events-conferences-guide/book>
- **American Bar Association Commission on Disability Rights**
[Toolkits & Projects \(americanbar.org\)](#)
- **ADA Events Accessibility**
<https://adata.org/guide/planning-guide-making-temporary-events-accessible-people-disabilities#PUBLICITYOFTHEEVENT>
- **Rooted in Rights**
<https://rootedinrights.org>
- **United Spinal Association Disability Etiquette Tips**
[DisabilityEtiquette.pdf \(unitedspinal.org\)](#)