Accessible Video Conferencing Guidelines

Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), York Region District School Board (YRDSB or the Board) is required to make all web content accessible and "provide educational or training resources or materials in an accessible format that takes into account the accessibility needs due to a disability" (Ontario Regulation 191/11, s. 15).

All Board educators and employees who are hosting an online, remote or virtual video conferencing tool or meeting platform must ensure the virtual environment is accessible. Consider the following guidelines so that people with disabilities can access video conferencing in a meaningful way:

1. Proactively seek accommodation needs
2. Share materials in advance
3. Learn the accessibility features
4. Be an inclusive host
5. Request feedback from participants

A quick reference version of these guidelines are available on page 7 as an Accessible Video Conferencing Checklist.

1. Proactively seek accommodation needs

Seek out accommodation needs without assumptions

Always ask participants to communicate any accommodation needs before hosting a video conferencing session. Identifying accommodation needs ahead of time should be a regular practice for ensuring that your duty to accommodate can be appropriately met.

Never assume participants will not have any accommodations needs, even if you believe you know all the participants. Disabilities can be acquired, temporary or situational. It is important to remember that disabilities and the

type of accommodations required for equitable participation can change over time.

Include an accommodation statement

Proactively identify accommodation needs by including an accommodation statement in any invitations, registration forms, and/or emails communications leading up to the virtual session. The following accommodation statement may be used as a template:

> "Please inform us if you have any accommodation needs regarding this [video conferencing session / virtual meeting]. We are committed to providing appropriate accommodations based on the Human Rights Code and consistent with the principles of dignity, individualization and inclusion."

Consult directly with the accommodation seeker

For any participant who makes an accommodation request, consult directly with them to provide the most appropriate accommodation in a way that respects their dignity, responds to their individualized need(s) and best promotes inclusion.

Follow the principles of accommodation

Throughout any accommodation process, be mindful of the three principles of the duty to accommodate:

1. **Respect for dignity:** Accommodation must be provided in the way that best respects the dignity of the learner or participant;

2. **Individualization:** Each accommodation request must be considered based on individual needs, and not by generalizing different types of disability; and

3. **Integration and full participation (inclusion):** Online learning and training environments must be designed inclusively to allow the active participation of learners or participants with accommodation needs.

2. Share materials in advance

Distributing accessible information and materials (such as agendas or slide decks) to all participants in advance of the video conferencing session is an effective way to provide alternative formats. It is similar to providing printed work booklets or information packages at in-person sessions.

Sharing relevant materials in advance also gives participants the opportunity to:

- Review materials at their own pace,
- Prepare any questions they may have in advance, and
- Leave the online meeting with take-away materials for future reference.

3. Learn the accessibility features

Under [Policy/Program Memorandum No. 164](#) (PPM 164), synchronous learning platforms or video conferencing tools should include accessibility features.

Know and share the accessibility features

Accommodation needs can be supported by ensuring all learners and participants have access to accessibility features in your chosen video conferencing platform. Accessibility features include: live captions*, screen reader software, screen magnifications and keyboard navigation.

> ***Did you know?** Automatic live captions have improved in recent years, but still do not caption speech with 100% accuracy. It is a best practice to retain professional captioning services as well as sign language interpreters for video conferencing sessions.

Become familiar with the different accessibility features before hosting a video conferencing session. Explain the key accessibility features to all participants at the beginning of each online session as a regular practice.

Offer a call-in option

A call-in phone number should be available for all participants as an alternative way to access the meeting or session. Some participants may have internet connectivity issues or may not be able to access the internet.

4. Be an inclusive host

Explain web conferencing features and expectations for use

Accessible web conferencing requires inclusive and welcoming hosts. In addition to sharing the accessibility features, the host should clearly explain the expectations for the following general features:

- **Camera:** Is it an expectation for participants to have their cameras turned on or off during the meeting?
- **Microphone (mic):** Are you reminding all participants to keep their mic turned off unless they are speaking?
- **Chat window:** Are you encouraging use of the chat feature during the session? Will you or someone else be actively monitoring the chat?
- **Closed captioning:** Did you enable automatic live captions (for Zoom)? And notify participants that they are available as needed?
- **Raise hand:** Do you want participants to use the "raise hand" feature?

Clarifying these features each time you host a video conferencing session is important because some participants may not be familiar with the features across different web conferencing platforms (e.g., Google Meet vs. Zoom).

Start with a visual self-introduction

Consider opening with a reflective or "**visual self-introduction**". Not every participant may be able to view your screen. This can be due to vision loss, technical issues, or calling-in.

A visual self-introduction is an inclusive way to give a general idea of what is on your screen by sharing any of the following information:

- name (with personal pronouns),
- personal traits or physical features,
- social identity markers,
- attire (what is visible on screen),
- virtual background, and/or
- physical location.

A [visual self-introduction example](#) was shared at the 2021 Accessibility Professional Network conference and can be accessed by the link above.

A visual introduction can also be used together with a [land acknowledgement](#) to start a video conferencing event, meeting or session in a good way.

Display information purposefully and meaningfully

When sharing or presenting your screen during a video conferencing session, remember that not every participant may be able to view your screen.

Information displayed on your screen should have a clear purpose and should be accessible to all participants in a meaningful way. Describe any graphics or visual information that you share from your screen as a regular practice.

5. Request feedback from participants

After a video conferencing session, provide the opportunity for participants to share feedback. Accessibility is a learning process, and asking for feedback is a way to evaluate your level of success with meeting accommodation needs and identify ways to improve moving forward.

Creating and asking participants to complete a [Google Form](#) is a simple way to collect and review feedback.

Thank you for taking the time to learn and make online, remote or virtual video conferencing more accessible!

Questions related the Accessible Video Conferencing Guidelines or alternative format requests can be directed to the Board's [Accessibility Officer](#). These guidelines are also available directly as web content on the YRDSB [Accessibility Resource Hub](#).

References

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005. Ontario Regulation 191/11: Integrated Accessibility Standards.

Described and Captioning Media Program [DCMP] (2022). Caption it Yourself: Basic Guidelines for Busy Teachers, Families, and Others Who Shoot Their Own Video.

Google Help Center (2022). Google Meet accessibility.

Google Help Center (2022). Present Google slides with captions

Ministry of Education (2020). Policy/Program Memorandum No. 164 - Requirements for Remote Learning.

Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology [PEAT] (2020). How to Pick an Accessible Virtual Meeting Platform.

PEAT (2020). 4 Elements of an Accessible Meeting Platform.

PEAT (2020). 7 Steps to Make Your Virtual Presentations Accessible.

Zoom (2021). Zoom is for Everyone: Accessibility is at the heart of what we do.

Accessible Video Conferencing Checklist

1. Proactively seek accommodate needs

Ask all participants to communicate any accommodation needs ahead of time.

☐ Include an accommodation statement in any invites, registration forms or emails.

☐ Consult directly with any participant who makes an accommodation request.

☐ Follow the principles of accommodation (dignity, individualization, inclusion).

2. Share relevant materials in advance

☐ Distribute accessible information and materials to all participants in advance.

3. Learn the accessibility features

☐ Become familiar with the accessibility features available in the video conference.

☐ Retain captioning services and sign language interpreters as a best practice.

☐ Offer a call-in number as an alternative option to access the meeting or session.

4. Be an inclusive host

☐ Explain web conferencing features and expectations for use (e.g., camera and mic).

☐ Consider opening with a reflective or visual self-introduction (refer to example).

☐ Have a clear purpose for displaying information if/when you share your screen.

☐ Verbally describe all visual information (for those who cannot view your screen).

5. Request feedback from participants

☐ Provide the opportunity for participants to share feedback (e.g. via Google Form).

☐ Remember that accessibility is a process and feedback fosters improvement.

Refer to the full Accessible Video Conferencing Guidelines for more information. Questions or alternative format requests can be directed to the Board's Accessibility Officer.