UKG

The Canadian Employer's Guide to Accessible and Inclusive Meetings

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Companies are increasingly aware of diversity, equity & inclusion (DEI). Many business leaders and human resources managers are thinking deeply about how their practices and processes contribute to the workplace culture and their impact on diverse workforces. Many company websites prominently feature a statement of their commitment to DEI, and they are working on ways to weave DEI into their hiring, onboarding and employee development practices and their customer-facing activities.

Despite this remarkable progress, one aspect of DEI often gets overlooked or inadequately addressed: accessibility. As a result, people with disabilities continue to encounter barriers to participation at work.

What is disability?

A disability impairs a person's ability to perform day-to-day activities. Some disabilities are genetic. Some are acquired through accidents, illnesses and chronic conditions. A disability may be temporary or permanent. Many disabilities are invisible.

There are many ways an organization can become more accessible to people with physical, cognitive, sensory, mental, intellectual, communication or learning disabilities. One activity, however, impacts nearly every employee: meetings. This guide therefore focuses on that crucial aspect of workplace participation and how to hold **accessible and inclusive meetings**.

We'll explore meetings through five accessibility lenses:

1. Technological barriers
2. Information & communication barriers
3. Physical (built environment) barriers
4. Attitudinal barriers
5. Organizational or systemic barriers

The great thing about making meetings accessible is that it's universally beneficial.
The suggestions in this guide will improve the quality of your meetings with everyone on the team, not only those with declared disabilities.
As a result, your meetings will be more productive, efficient and inclusive.

Let's get started!

Meetings — What Are They Good For?

Meetings are one of the essential communication tools a company uses.[1] Good meetings allow team members to participate fully in a company's success. Leaders can use meetings to build engagement and collaboration, communicate a shared sense of purpose, share knowledge and lessons learned, and give shout-outs for a job well done.

If you ever wonder, "Why are we having this meeting?" it could be because your meeting isn't performing one of these functions:

- **Sharing key information** (e.g., quarterly or annual company-wide meetings to discuss changes to the company structure, direction, or key personnel)

- **Providing updates** (e.g., weekly check-ins on a project's status, timeline or required resources)

- **Providing training** (delivering formal or informal learning experiences, with opportunities for team members to participate in a shared learning environment)

- **Decision making** (exploring options, sharing perspectives, pitching potential solutions, weighing pros and cons, voting or reaching consensus)

- **Brainstorming** (bouncing ideas off other team members, building on each other's ideas, innovating)

- **Solving challenges** (overcoming issues through collaboration, strategizing as a team, creating an action plan)

- **Giving and receiving feedback** (allowing team members to share their opinions, experiences and lessons learned; providing team members with direction and encouragement)

All companies want to maximize the value they get from meetings. After all, meetings represent a cost. Every minute team members spend in a meeting is a minute they could be working on job tasks or projects. That's why it's so important that everyone at a meeting can participate fully. For this reason, accessibility is critical.

If a meeting isn't accessible to all participants…

Team members don't get access to needed information.

For example, if a manager shares a PowerPoint presentation with graphics to explain the stages of a product launch, but the presentation doesn't include alternative text to describe those graphics, a team member with a visual impairment will get only a partial story. The onus is then on the team member to pursue the missing information, either by following up with the manager and asking for it in another format or by trying to gather it from other team members who may not recall it completely or accurately.

Team members are left out of decisions.

For example, suppose a company decides to hold a decision-making workshop at a ski lodge in order to team-build both in the conference room and on the ski hill afterwards. In that case, that choice may exclude an employee with a mobility impairment. Even if 90% of the team's work gets done in the conference room, that employee will miss out on the work-related conversations that happen in the snow and on the chairlift. This exclusion can make them feel less engaged with the work and less invested in the team's decisions. This type of meeting ends up partitioning employees into those who can participate and those who cannot, contributing to an ableist work culture.

Team members may not fully understand their role in a project or how its timeline impacts their work.

For example, suppose a leader uses one particular method to share project management information, such as a Gantt chart. This assumes that everyone on the team can absorb the data in that format. However, a team member with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may become overwhelmed when the information is presented this way. This feeling can make it difficult for them to pace their tasks and understand how their duties fit into the general project timeline.

Team members can't fully share their ideas.

For example, suppose a leader enjoys on-the-spot collaborations, insists that everyone "think quickly," and puts time limits on contributions. This may intimidate or even exclude people who need time to process information. In addition, this can feel like exclusion for employees with cognitive, communication or learning disabilities. Even if they think their ideas are valuable, they may not share them for fear of being pressured or stigmatized for being "slow." As a result, the team will miss out on their input.

Team members don't get to be their authentic selves.

If a company doesn't have a culture of accessibility, it may use language that praises people who are "quick-witted," "able-bodied," or "multi-taskers." In this way, the company communicates that it devalues disability. This exclusive attitude disincentivizes employees with disabilities to ask for what they need to be successful and, in some cases, incentivizes them to conceal who they truly are. For example, many people on the autism spectrum attempt to "pass" as non-autistic (also known as "masking"), which requires effort and can be stressful. In a meeting, if someone isn't free to be who they truly are, they may miss out on the opportunity to shine in their role and receive credit for what they contribute.

The impact of inaccessible meetings

The impact of inaccessible meetings is profound. They contradict the values of inclusion; they prevent companies from leveraging the skills of employees with disabilities. The result may be lower engagement and lack of growth in the job for employees with disabilities. It's also a missed opportunity to build cohesive teams where everyone appreciates each other's diverse strengths.

Accessible meetings create a safe space for disclosure

You might think it doesn't matter if meetings are accessible — for instance if you don't have any employees with disabilities. But you may be surprised to know that most disabilities are invisible. **Canada's three most common disabilities are pain, flexibility, and mobility impairments.**[2] Other invisible disabilities include depression, anxiety, digestive issues, and partial hearing or vision loss.

There are multiple reasons why someone may choose not to disclose a disability, including:

- Feeling stigmatized or judged
- Concern about being passed over for opportunities
- The disability doesn't affect their work and/or they do not need accommodations
- They don't consider their condition a disability
- Past negative experiences following disclosure
- Personal reasons

Did you know?

Most accommodations for disability cost nothing to the employer. For those that have a cost, it is usually a one-time expenditure of less than $500.

So, don't make the mistake of assuming there are no employees with disabilities in your organization. On the contrary, if you make a point of making your meetings accessible, you'll send a potent message that your company cares about disability inclusion. It can even create a safe environment for your people to disclose a disability — which can benefit your company.

Use An Accessibility Lens

Think about the meetings that take place in your organization right now. Are they fully accessible?

Let's use an accessibility lens to examine some typical workplace meetings.

In-person meetings

In-person meetings may be one-on-one, small group meetings, or large gatherings. They may occur in a cubicle, an office, a boardroom, or an offsite location.

Below, we examine five potential barriers that may impact participants at in-person meetings and some ways to overcome them.

Type of barrier: Technological

How it's a barrier to accessibility

If an in-person meeting has a technical component, such as a PowerPoint or a video:

- Some people may not be able to read onscreen text or perceive icons and graphics.
- Flashing, strobing effects, or high contrast may be uncomfortable for some people.
- If there are no captions, people with hearing impairments may not be able to follow the presentation.

How to overcome the barrier

- Check to ensure anyone who requires a screen reader can use it at the meeting.
- Use PowerPoint's built-in Accessibility Checker on all presentations before showing them.
- Make sure all pictures and graphics have alternative text that explains what they are.
- Make sure all videos have captions and check whether people would like them turned on.
- Provide a warning if you are going to show a video that involves flashing, strobing, or high contrast, and be prepared with an alternative.
- Allow participants to read the presentation or video transcript on their own in a comfortable space.

Type of barrier: Information & communication

How it's a barrier to accessibility

If people at the meeting have different learning styles or absorb information differently and you don't consider these, your meeting will be less effective.

How to overcome the barrier

- Ask participants how they would like to work during the meeting. For example, if it's a brainstorming session, check whether they're comfortable talking spontaneously or if they'd rather talk one at a time.
- Pay attention to participants who don't seem engaged. Ask how they would like to contribute. For example, they may prefer to write down their ideas rather than say them out loud.
- Deliver information in multiple formats. For instance, you can reinforce what you say verbally by giving everyone a handout with key points.
- Circulate an agenda before the meeting, stating what will occur and how much time will be allocated for each agenda item.
- Use plain language. Avoid jargon and acronyms. Speak and write in small sentences.
- Use a readable font (at least 12 pt.) for written communication. Break information up with headings and bullet points.
- Include visuals to help convey information. Avoid choosing visuals that are abstract; try to make sure they connect thematically with the subject matter.
- Ask participants questions to check for understanding. Be willing to rephrase what you've said in different ways.
- If someone prefers not to make eye contact, understand that this is important for their comfort and that it does not mean they're not engaged.

Type of barrier: Physical

How it's a barrier to accessibility

An in-person meeting space can pose problems if:

- It has narrow doors that aren't wheelchair accessible
- It's configured so that wheelchairs and other mobility devices don't fit or force people to sit off to the side, away from others
- It has glaring lights, strong smells, or visual distractions that can contribute to sensory overload
- It isn't acoustically treated, resulting in echoes or loud ambient noise
- It's located in a busy area with high traffic and a high potential for interruptions
- It's at an offsite location that is hard to travel to or park at
- There are no accessible washrooms or lunch facilities
- Chairs are arranged in a way that doesn't permit lip readers to see other people talking
- Chairs are too close to each other, leading to discomfort

How to overcome the barrier

- Choose meeting locations that everyone can get to easily and that have accessible parking, washrooms and dining facilities.
- Make sure the meeting area has space for wheelchairs and mobility devices.
- Choose spaces that have soft lighting (avoid fluorescent fixtures) and acoustic treatment to minimize noise.
- Avoid having a meeting in areas with strong smells (such as the lunchroom or any location where chemicals are used).
- Consider a no-fragrance policy.
- Try to choose a meeting area with a door that can be closed to shut out distractions. Likewise, ensure you can close blinds if needed.
- Arrange chairs so that everyone has enough "personal space." Configure the chairs based on the meeting you'll have (i.e., rows of chairs for a presentation and a round table for brainstorming). For example, if a team member reads lips, arrange the chairs in a circle, so everyone's mouth is visible.
- If you hold a meeting outdoors, check participants' comfort level and pay attention to things that may cause discomfort (excessive heat, pollen, noise, etc.).

Type of barrier: Attitudinal

How it's a barrier to accessibility

Some of the most significant barriers to accessibility are attitudinal. They include:

- Ableist language
- Patronizing language
- Suggestions that employees with disabilities can't take on specific tasks or lead projects
- Assumptions about what people with disabilities can and cannot do
- Resentment toward people with disabilities who get accommodations

How to overcome the barrier

- If an employee has disclosed a disability, ask how they would like to be referred to. Some people prefer person-first language (e.g., a person who uses a wheelchair or a person with epilepsy). Some people prefer identity-first language (e.g., an autistic person, a deaf person). Then, use this language in meetings and all your interactions with them.
- Understand that people with disabilities are experts at navigating a world that wasn't designed for them. Ask for their suggestions to make meetings more accessible.
- Provide opportunities for people with disabilities to take the lead. If they don't put themselves forward for leadership, it may be because of past negative experiences. But people must see they can take the lead and do it well.
- Don't speak on behalf of people with disabilities.

- Treat people with disabilities as you would any other meeting participant — while being aware of potential barriers and taking steps to remove them.

- Never assume what someone can or cannot do — always ask!

- If another employee asks why an employee with a disability is given an accommodation, do not breach privacy; just answer that your organization's policy is to make meetings accessible for all and that anyone who would like accommodation is welcome to make a request.

Type of barrier: Organizational & systemic

How it's a barrier to accessibility

Practices and policies embedded at an organizational, systemic level can contribute to barriers. For example:

- Requiring everyone to attend in-person meetings

- Requiring people with disabilities to participate in ways that pose challenges for them (for example, requiring someone with anxiety to speak in front of a group)

- Lacking an accommodations policy

How to overcome the barrier

- Revisit your meeting practices. Do they provide options for people who find it challenging to attend in-person meetings? If so, rewrite them to make them accessible.

- Think about the activities involved in meetings. Are you providing all possible options for people to participate? If not, brainstorm other ways to invite participation.

- If you don't have a formal policy regarding accommodations, create one and share it internally and externally.

Virtual meetings

Virtual meetings have always taken place, but before the COVID-19 pandemic, they usually involved teleconferencing. However, the pandemic ushered in a new era of virtual work and made Zoom a household name.

Virtual meetings have enormous potential to make meetings accessible for everyone, but like in-person meetings, there are best practices for optimizing participation and overall success.

Let's explore virtual meetings through an accessibility lens.

Type of barrier: Technological

How it's a barrier to accessibility

- If someone doesn't have access to video conferencing technology, this may pose a barrier.
- If a video conference freezes or buffers, people reliant on assistive devices may not know what's happening.
- If a meeting involves video conferencing tools such as whiteboarding or screen sharing, it may be difficult for people with visual impairment to follow along.

How to overcome the barrier

- Ensure that everyone at your meeting can access the technology needed to participate, including assistive devices.
- Have a backup method of checking in with people if the technology freezes or buffers, such as text messaging.
- Encourage everyone to engage with the video conferencing technology in ways that make sense for them. For example, if they prefer to turn their camera off, mute themselves or just use the chat, let them know this is fine.
- Check with participants that they can access the tools you're using during your meeting, and provide alternatives.
- Turn on captions as a general practice, and capture a recorded transcript at the end of your meeting.
- Record all meetings so that people can access them later if needed.

Type of barrier: Information & communication

How it's a barrier to accessibility

- For some employees, video conferencing can be technologically challenging. For example, they may have difficulty managing meeting invitations, logging on, and accessing or sharing documents through the chat.

How to overcome the barrier

- Use consistent processes for inviting people to meetings. Tip: If you do not receive confirmation that they're attending, follow up with them to make sure they know how to access the meeting.
- Circulate an agenda before and during the meeting. Ask participants to confirm they can access and understand the agenda. Then, ask if they would like to make any modifications.

Type of barrier: Physical

How it's a barrier to accessibility

- Some employees may experience sensory discomfort or even overload when video conferencing.
- Video conferencing can be stressful for some people, as it involves ongoing eye contact.
- For some employees, video conferencing can feel alienating, like they're removed from the meeting.

How to overcome the barrier

- Encourage all participants to mute themselves during the call to reduce background noise and distractions.
- If participants prefer to meet with cameras off, let them know this is fine.
- If participants prefer not to see themselves on camera during the meeting, let them know they can turn off self-view.
- Provide hybrid options if some employees prefer to meet in person (some people call in via video conference, while others attend together in person).
- Check with employees to find out how they feel about video conferencing. If you notice they are participating less than they would in an in-person meeting, ask them what's going on and offer support to help them get more comfortable.

Type of barrier: Attitudinal

How it's a barrier to accessibility

As with in-person meetings, people with disabilities may experience barriers in virtual meetings. In addition to the barriers already mentioned, be alert to:

- Participants talking over people with disabilities
- Participants not giving time to people with disabilities to communicate
- Participants making assumptions that people with disabilities cannot participate
- Participants using tools that aren't accessible

How to overcome the barrier

- At the start of the meeting, if you know someone is using an assistive device, have them explain that this is the case and whether it affects how other participants should interact with them.
- Set ground rules for participation and actively moderate the meeting to ensure that everyone has a turn communicating.
- Tell the group which tools are accessible for the whole group and ask them to avoid using inaccessible tools.
- Consider demonstrating how assistive technology works so that all participants will understand a person's experience using it.

Type of barrier: Organizational & systemic

How it's a barrier to accessibility

As with in-person meetings, be aware of practices and policies that can create barriers. For example:

- Having a cameras-on policy for meetings
- Complicated processes for granting accommodations such as assistive technology

How to overcome the barrier

- If you don't have guidelines for how to run virtual meetings, consider writing some with accessibility in mind.
- Always ask people with a disability what will make it easiest for them to participate fully.
- Streamline processes for providing assistive technology.
- Have a designated person who handles requests for assistive devices, and ensure they know how to procure them and set them up.
- Provide opportunities for staff members to learn about assistive technology and sign language.

Different types of meetings

Over the years, different meeting styles have sprung up. Many of these, such as team huddles, have become commonplace. Others, such as walking meetings and silent meetings, are less conventional. If you've adopted any of these meeting styles, they can benefit from an accessibility audit.

Team huddles

Also called scrums, team huddles are designed to be quick, focused meetings that allow people to check in, determine action items and then go back to their regular workday. Avoid referring to these meetings as "stand-up meetings." And ask the following questions:

- Do they require participants to join the meeting with little notice?
- Are they held in places with wheelchair access?
- Are they a reasonable length to justify the effort to join the huddle if it requires a person with a disability to change location or bring along assistive equipment?
- Are they comfortable for people who get anxious in groups?
- Do they require people to stand — for instance, gathered around a bulletin board?

Walking meetings

Walking meetings are designed with well-being in mind. They incorporate some exercise and a change of surroundings, indoors or outdoors. They can help combat fatigue and provide participants with new perspectives. In addition, they can relieve participants who feel uncomfortable making eye contact and would rather walk side by side while talking. However, this style of interaction should be used thoughtfully. Ask the following questions:

- Can everyone participate comfortably in a walking meeting? Will anyone opt out of this meeting and miss the information shared?
- Will the walking pace be comfortable for all participants?
- Is this type of meeting appropriate for the purpose? For example, how much information will be shared while walking, and can it be retained?
- Will there be distractions while walking? Will this impact the amount of information that is retained? Will it impact people's ability to participate fully?
- Will there be environmental factors such as pollen, bright sun or heat, or cold? How will these impact participants? For example, will they feel comfortable telling you if there is an issue, or will they tough it out and suffer as a result?
- If some participants use a wheelchair, will you continue to call this type of meeting a walking meeting? Or will you use another term?

Silent meetings

The idea of silent meetings originated at Amazon and has spread to other companies.

In a silent meeting, the chairperson or facilitator opens the session with a topic or question. Then, everyone works quietly. When it's time to share, people do so by using sticky notes or virtual chat.

Silent meetings are a great equalizer for participants, as they overcome the imbalances that arise between introverts and extroverts. Everyone has equal time to think and react to each other's input; no one talks over anyone else; people are less likely to get confused, and there's a reduction in repetition. People can read and work at their own pace — especially helpful for those who are fast readers and people who use screen readers. Remote attendees can participate easily. If English isn't a participant's first language, a silent meeting can make participation easier.

There are apparent benefits to silent meetings, but they should still be done thoughtfully. Ask these questions:

- Is everyone able to give input in a format that's comfortable for them?
- Can everyone access all input?

Did you know?

An experienced screen reader user may read 300 words a minute or up to 22 syllables per second, well beyond what an inexperienced listener could comprehend.[3]

Accessibility post-COVID

The COVID-19 pandemic taught us a lot about flexible work. It forced companies to rethink how their teams could work together effectively. And that thinking is still evolving.

Heading into a post-pandemic era, our newfound confidence in virtual and hybrid work presents an opportunity for people with disabilities, many of whom worked from home before COVID struck. The number of jobs that can be performed virtually has increased, but so has the number of people who desire a work-from-home arrangement. **In keeping with their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, should hiring managers consider new job postings their chance to hire people with disabilities?**

In the case of hybrid work, employers should realize that it may be both a blessing and a curse for people with disabilities. It's positive because it allows them to work from home at least part-time, but it can be onerous if they are expected to change locations with short notice. In addition, if they're expected to commute to and from work for their in-person days, along with assistive devices, they may find this cumbersome. Some disability advocates regard this aspect of hybrid work as a missed opportunity to truly provide flexibility.

Did you know?

Studies show that people with disabilities are more likely to remain at a job; 86% have equal or better attendance rates, and 90% perform as well or better than co-workers.[4]

Myths About Accessible Meetings

If your company has a set way of running meetings, you may feel reluctant to "fix what isn't broken." But it's worthwhile reading through these common myths and misconceptions about accessible meetings, then ask yourself — are any of these true for me?

MYTH: "It costs money to make meetings accessible."

FACT: Accessible meetings don't need to cost more money.

If you have employees who use assistive devices or other accommodations to do their work, chances are they can use those same accommodations when they attend meetings.

MYTH: "It's hard to get started with accessible meetings."

FACT: There are some easy actions you can take to get started.

To make your meetings more accessible and inclusive, start by asking your employees what they need to be able to participate. Employees with disabilities are experts in what they need to thrive; they can advise you and help you take action in small steps.

MYTH: "Meetings will be less fun."

FACT: Meetings can be fun while also being accessible.

The fact is, meetings don't need to take place on a ski hill or at an amusement park. The best meetings allow everyone to feel fully engaged, be themselves, and share what they bring to their roles. Re-examine the notion that offsite events must feature physical activities or new scenery. If this is what you're doing to energize employees, it could be there's something fundamentally missing from their day-to-day work experience.

MYTH: "It's time-consuming to prepare for an accessible meeting."

FACT: All effective meetings require preparation.

It doesn't take more time to prep for an accessible meeting than for a traditional meeting. And if you create some standard practices for accessible meetings, it will just be a matter of following a checklist.

MYTH: "There are no people with disabilities at our company, so there's no point."

FACT: There are more people with disabilities than you think.

Not only are many disabilities invisible, but the majority of disabilities are also acquired as people age. For example, the average age of disability onset is 53.[5] So the fact that you haven't had a request for accessible meetings yet doesn't mean you won't—and it doesn't mean your existing employees won't benefit from accessible meetings.

Furthermore, making your meetings accessible sends a signal internally and externally to your clients, your customer base, and the talent you want to attract.

MYTH: "There's no benefit to accessible meetings if no one with a disability is attending."

FACT: Accessible meetings benefit everybody.

Everyone benefits from accessibility. Plain language ensures everybody can understand. Features such as captions can be helpful to everyone. And other considerations such as lighting and ambiance can have a positive effect on your whole team.

Did you know?

83% of disabilities are not present at birth; they are acquired. These include disease onset, mental illness, injury or trauma, and the aging process itself.[6]

48% of Canadians believe hiding a disability increases a candidate's chances of being hired.[7]

Elements Of An Accessible Meeting

Culture

The number one thing you can do to ensure accessible meetings is to examine your company culture. For example, a company committed to diversity and inclusion should consider accessibility part of that mandate.

It may be helpful to think of accessibility as the fourth component of DEI. Some companies have even adopted acronyms such as IDEA (inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility). Without accessibility, a company cannot be fully inclusive.

A culture of accessibility takes root when leaders model accessibility from the top down. Examples include developing a formal commitment statement, embedding it in all communications (including meeting memos, agendas and minutes), creating policies for accessible meetings, and ensuring all employees are aware of them and know how to implement meetings based on those policies.

> **CASE IN POINT**
>
> *Dan Price of Gravity Payments created a policy stating that if even one team member is not physically present for a meeting, the meeting is automatically hybrid, with everyone welcome to access it virtually.*

Lastly, a company can build an accessibility culture by leveraging champions for accessibility. For example, consider inviting people with disabilities to co-develop accessibility policies for meetings.

Did you know?

According to a global survey, 90% of employers said diversity & inclusion was a priority — but only 4% were actively working on disability inclusion.[8]

Preparation

We've all sat in meetings that were ill-prepared and possibly not needed. If a meeting is also inaccessible, that compounds time wastage. Here are some tips to make your meetings as accessible (and valuable) as possible:

- Circulate an agenda at least 24 hours before the meeting. Share it in multiple formats so participants can access and absorb it optimally.

- Set expectations. Your agenda should state what will occur in the meeting, how long each item will take, who will address each item, and how everyone should prepare beforehand.

- Provide instructions. In your invitation and agenda, include joining instructions for virtual meetings and additional instructions for navigation and tools — state whether cameras are optional.

- Optimize meeting times so everyone who needs to be there can attend. For example, if you are running a hybrid meeting, don't schedule it during the typical commute time. On the other hand, if employees are working modified hours, determine which time will best fit.

- Only have a meeting if you need one. Some goals can be accomplished without a meeting.

Participation

An accessible meeting isn't just technically accessible; it's also a safe space for people to participate.

An excellent way to set the tone is with an Indigenous land acknowledgement, stating the territory where the meeting is being held. If the meeting is virtual or hybrid and people are calling in from multiple territories, acknowledge that this is the case.

Facilitate the meeting in a thoughtful, inclusive way. If anyone is new, introduce them.

If someone has a disability and would like to share, invite them to share what would be helpful for them in the meeting. But do not put anyone on the spot by asking them to discuss their disability without getting permission first.

Offer a variety of formats for participating. Try to provide alternatives to all activities. For example, if someone isn't comfortable speaking, offer them the choice to share their ideas in writing. Give participants as much choice as possible.

Note that not everyone has the same attention span or learning style. Therefore, try to vary how you present information to appeal to various styles.

Provide breaks.

Meeting content

To ensure all participants get maximum value in the meeting, use plain language, avoiding jargon, idioms, unfamiliar acronyms, and complex sentences. If you will be using acronyms or complex language, consider providing a glossary.

Use inclusive language. Stay up to date on language and ensure you are using appropriate terms.

Choose fonts that are easy to read.[9] Studies have shown that Helvetica, Arial, Courier and Verdana are helpful for readers with dyslexia. Italics can significantly decrease readability.

Ensure that people with sensory disabilities can understand the information. For example, you may wish to hire a sign language interpreter for an in-person meeting. For a virtual meeting, enable captions for people with hearing impairments and alternative text for people with visual impairments who use a screen reader.

Do an accessibility check on all handouts. For example, ensure they have good contrast and are readable in greyscale by people who are colour-blind. If sharing digital handouts or presentations, ensure they are WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines)[10] compliant.

Technology

Always check your tech. Make sure you know how to turn on video conferencing captions and capture a transcript. If your team collaborates virtually, ensure the tools you use are not mouse-dependent and that keyboard shortcuts can be used.

If you're not sure your documents or tools are accessible, consider hiring a tester. Companies such as Fable can provide testers with disabilities and custom training to help you make your meetings more inclusive.

Aim for full inclusion

A meeting is only accessible if everyone who needs to be there is included and has what they need to participate. If someone can't attend a meeting, provide them with a recording, transcript, chat log, and any action items that were decided.

Follow up on all meetings. Solicit participants' opinions. Ask if they felt included and had opportunities to participate. Then, incorporate any suggestions into your next meeting.

Did you know?

Diverse, inclusive workplaces are more likely to meet financial targets, more likely to be innovative, and more flexible to change.

Demonstrating that your workplace is diverse and inclusive can help you attract top talent. Two-thirds of job seekers say an employer's commitment to diversity is one of their job search criteria. [11]

Tips For Human Resources Professionals

HR has a role to play in making meetings accessible and inclusive. Here are some tips:

- Determine if your organization has a set of policies about meetings. If policies do not exist, consider brainstorming with department leads to generate policies around accessibility and inclusivity that enable all employees to participate fully.

- Be prepared to have conversations about disability. Many employees may feel uncomfortable disclosing a disability. They may benefit from a welcoming, open environment where they know they can speak privately and be reassured that there will be no negative repercussions for disclosing.

- Understand the range of accommodations that employees with disabilities may request, and be prepared to suggest accommodations if an employee isn't sure what will help them succeed.

- Familiarize yourself with assistive technologies, including how they work and which companies supply them.

- Always be thinking about employee education. For example, it may be exciting and helpful to have everyone take a sign language class or learn about Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

- Support employees to form employee resource groups (ERGs).

Summary

Meetings are one of the principal ways a company communicates. That's why they must be inclusive in every sense — including accessibility.

You may have thought about diversity, equity and inclusion and how to achieve them at your meetings, but if you haven't considered how accessibility fits, you still have some work to do. The great thing is that many people can assist you in the journey to fully accessible meetings.

Leverage the knowledge and experience of people with disabilities at your organization. If you're unsure who has a disability, this is an excellent opportunity to find out. Consider embedding an optional survey question into HR questionnaires (for example, when you update employees' demographic information). During the hiring process, too, you can ask questions about disability status, as long as you ask them of all candidates. When you do so, inform candidates and employees that questions about disability help you fulfill your commitment to disability inclusion.

There are many other ways to go further with accessibility. Visit the resources below to learn more!

Resources

- [JAN workplace accommodation tool kit](#)
- [Accessible Employers Workplace Accommodation Guide](#)
- [Government of Canada – Duty to Accommodate: A General Process for Managers](#)
- [6 Ways to Start Thinking about Workplace Accessibility Right Now](#)
- [To Accommodate or Not to Accommodate – Hiding Disabilities in the Workplace](#)

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About UKG

At UKG, our purpose is people. As strong believers in the power of culture and belonging as the secret to success, we champion great workplaces and build lifelong partnerships with our customers to show what's possible when businesses invest in their people. Born from a historic merger that created one of the world's leading HCM cloud companies, our Life-work Technology approach to HR, payroll, and workforce management solutions for all people helps 50,000 organizations around the globe and across every industry anticipate and adapt to their employees' needs beyond just work. To learn more, visit ukg.com.

About the author

Parris Consulting is a diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion-focused consulting firm based in Vancouver, Canada. We are dedicated to assisting organizations across North America build equitable, diverse, and inclusive workforces.

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