



CANADIAN
BAR ASSOCIATION
Alberta

Accessibility Guide



Prepared by the Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Committee

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Accessibility Guide

Hosting an accessible event means maximizing attendee engagement and enjoyment. When organizing events, whether in person or online, firms and organizations may not realize that a person with a disability may be hesitant to attend an event if they do not know ahead of time whether it will be accessible, due to the potential presence of accessibility barriers, such as physical obstacles, communication barriers, navigation barriers and web-based barriers.

Removing these barriers benefits all attendees and allows attendees with disabilities to fully participate in events and activities. This enhances an environment of inclusivity and diversity and allows firms and organizations to tangibly demonstrate their commitment to inclusion.

Ensuring a broader range of audience engagement results in reaching more diverse audiences. Overall, intentional, well-executed accessibility initiatives create a more enriching environment for everyone and help to promote a more inclusive legal profession.

Best Practices - All Events

Pre-Event

When you send out the invitation or notice, include a welcome message to let invitees know they can contact the planner regarding accommodations.

Your message might include text such as:

- In person: “We strive to host inclusive, accessible events that enable all individuals, including individuals with disabilities, to engage fully. To be respectful of those with allergies and environmental sensitivities, we ask that you please refrain from wearing strong fragrances. To request an accommodation or for inquiries about accessibility, please contact (name, email, phone).”
- Virtual: “We strive to host inclusive, accessible events that enable all individuals, including individuals with disabilities, to engage fully. To request an accommodation or for inquiries about accessibility, please contact (name, email, phone).”
- Make sure you follow up on all requests received. If it appears you will be unable to meet a specific request, follow up with the individual who made the request to determine whether an alternative arrangement can be made.

At the Event

Consider assigning a note-taker for events, particularly when no materials are made available to participants. If the event is hybrid (being delivered in person and online), turn on the closed captioning feature on Zoom, and save it as a transcript. Many presentations can be challenging for individuals with disabilities, (such as a learning disabilities or ADHD, for example), and having notes available following a presentation can make it easier for these individuals to review and retain the information provided.

Event organizers may also want to consider accommodations required for sign language interpreters should they be provided by an attendee. This may include having space for the interpreter at the front of the room (for in-person events), and having the interpreter appear on camera for virtual events.

Post-Event

When sending post-event surveys, include questions asking participants to provide feedback on the availability of accessibility accommodations and quality of those accommodations.

Best Practices: In-Person Events

Pre-Event

Look for these features when inspecting your meeting space, particularly if it is being held offsite of the usual meeting premises:

- **Visibility:** Consider those with impaired sight
 - Clear signage (identifying location and directions)
 - Well-lit meeting space and adjacent areas
 - Projection screen visible from all seating
- **Acoustics:** Consider those with hearing impairment
 - Public address (PA) system
 - Roving microphones
 - Limit unnecessary background music
 - Seating available near the presenter for lip reading
 - Availability of assistive listening devices
 - Well-lit space for an interpreter if needed
- **Mobility:** Consider those who may be in a wheelchair or have other mobility impairments
 - Accessible parking near venue
 - Proximity to bus stop
 - Ramp and/or elevator access
 - Accessible bathrooms
 - Barrier-free pathways
 - Wide doorways and aisles to accommodate wheelchairs and scooters
 - No loose cables across walking areas
- **Technology:** Consider those who may need to use adaptive devices.
 - Electrical outlets in accessible seating areas to accommodate devices
 - Extra space or work surface for devices
- **Service Animals:** Consider access and space for service dogs
 - Comfortable space for service animals to rest during event
 - Accessible toileting and watering facilities nearby
- **Inclusivity:** Consider whether the venue is inclusive for all attendees.
 - When possible, prioritize venues with gender-neutral restroom facilities

Pre-Event

Ensure that presenters are aware of CBA Alberta's commitment to inclusive meetings and ask them to prepare and deliver their presentations with accessibility in mind.

- **Designate:** At larger events or events with scheduled accommodations, designate someone to be responsible for accommodations as well as help with seating, ensuring captioning and other technology is working, maintaining clear pathways, or other needs. In the case of hybrid virtual/in-person meetings, designate an individual to monitor the chat or Q&A function on the webinar platform.
- **Presentations:** Provide presenters with the "Tips for Presenters" guide. Request that the presenters:
 - o Submit materials in advance so that they can be forwarded to individuals who may not be able to view screens or flip charts;
 - o Always use a microphone;
 - o Encourage regular breaks; and
 - o Organize breakout group activities to maximize distance between groups (if applicable).
- **Q&A:** Make sure to repeat questions posed by audience members before responding, especially if there is not a roving microphone available. Presenters or audience members may express confidence they are loud enough and do not need a microphone. Regardless, ask them to speak into one.
- **Technology:** Consider those who may need to use adaptive devices.
 - o Electrical outlets in accessible seating areas to accommodate devices
 - o Extra space or work surface for devices
- **Food:** Clearly indicate and accommodate for allergens, religious dietary restrictions, and other restrictions such as vegan or vegetarian.

Best Practices: Virtual Events

Virtual meeting technology

Look for these features when setting up your virtual meeting space:

- Enable the closed captions feature: This will allow participants who need it to turn on automated closed captioning in meetings.
- Enable “always show meeting controls”: Zoom controls will remain up, improving user experience.
- Enable the “mute participants upon entry” feature: Participants will be muted by default when entering the meeting, resulting in less disruptions.

Designate a person to assist with technical issues that may arise for participants.

Adapted from Yale University's "Accessibility Best Practices for Zoom Meetings" (<https://usability.yale.edu/digital-accessibility/accessibility-resources/accessibility-articles/zoom-meetings>)

Presentation Materials

- Ensure presentation materials are accessible. Materials, including PowerPoint presentations and handouts, must be accessible. Tips include:
 - Alternative (Alt) Text – Alt text describes images and other graphics in documents or on websites. Blind or low-vision individuals use alt text to describe these images and to give context as to why the image is there. The alt text is picked up by their screen readers. Alt text descriptions should be short and include essential information that conveys what an image looks like and means.
 - Headings and Structure – Headings are like “road map” signs—they provide structure for the information and lead readers through the document. Using the headings function allows screen readers and other assistive technology to better navigate a document. Headings should be in a logical order, and subheadings should appear underneath main headings.
 - Colour/Font - Check the colour contrast and font size in your documents. Avoid using light colours and use a font that is at least 12 to 14 point. Consider using a sans serif font, which is easier to read.
- Provide accessible copies of the entire presentation, including handouts, before the webinar. This enables webinar participants to review the information ahead of time so they can focus on listening to the presenters.

During Presentation

- At the beginning of the event, identify to participants which accessibility services are available as well as any accessibility functions within the online platform.
- Ask meeting participants to turn their cameras on when they are speaking, if possible, and to state their name each time they speak so captioners and attendees know who is speaking.
- Ask speakers to, when possible:
 - look directly into the camera when speaking
 - ensure they are in a well-lit space
 - have a plain background behind them on camera
- Ask all participants to mute their microphone when not speaking to reduce background noise.
- Ensure all graphics and images that are referenced during the meeting, such as in PowerPoint presentations, are described. Don't assume everyone can see what is on the screen.
- Use plain language when speaking.
- Ensure the captioning on the screen does not cover the content of presentations.
- Whenever possible, encourage participants to use the chat feature, which provides an additional way for participants to communicate.
- Don't assume everyone can see the messages, and be sure to read them aloud when referencing them.

Adapted from the Government of Nova Scotia's Guide to Planning Accessible Online Meetings and Events (<https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/docs/online-Accessible-Events-Guide.pdf>)

Tips for Presenters

Presentation Design

When designing accessible presentations for all audiences, presenters will want to consider the following:

- Text:
 - Make the text as large as possible, even “less important” text such as data labels, graph axes, legends and footnotes.
 - Consider the font being used in the slides. Sans serif fonts are typically the most readable, particularly for a neurodivergent audience.
 - Be generous with spacing between letters, words and lines.
 - Use bold for emphasis rather than underline or italics.
 - Use mixed case, not all caps.
 - Images and Colour:
 - Use high-contrast images and colours. Consider using a combination of colours and textures, especially for charts and graphs.
 - Consider using images or icons where appropriate. This helps break up the text, serve as anchors on the slides, and can improve comprehension for neuro-divergent audiences.
- Tip:** Print the presentation in black and white. Are the graphics still legible without the colour?
- Slide Layout:
 - Limit slide transitions, which can cause nausea, headaches and dizziness in people with vestibular (inner ear) disorders.
 - Create a clear visual hierarchy of information on your slides by breaking up blocks of text into smaller, more digestible pieces with headings or graphics.
 - Formatting for Screen Readers:
 - Organize content in a linear fashion from top to bottom, left to right. Put key messages as early as possible on each slide so listeners will know they key focus sooner.
 - Write alt-text (alternative text) for all images, including charts. The alt-text should be descriptive, concise, identify the image’s main purpose, use proper punctuation, and use language that is appropriate for the audience.

Tips: In Microsoft PowerPoint, use the Selection Pane (go to the Home tab, then Drawing, Arrange, and Selection Pane) to show you the order in which a screen reader will navigate through your content. Windows also comes with “Microsoft Narrator” pre-installed, which you can use to listen to how the PowerPoint presentation is designed and adjust for improved accessibility.

The above recommendations also apply for any other materials handed out to event attendees, such as case comments. Ensure that all materials are accessible by screen reader (the majority of Microsoft Word and PDF documents are), and that you have added alt-text to all images and charts.

Presenters should also be prepared to provide slide decks and any other materials to event organizers at least 48 hours in advance so it can be provided upon request to attendees who would benefit from extra time to review the content prior to the event.

Presenting Tips

1. Have a clear beginning, middle and end. Set expectations up front by providing a brief outline of the information you will be covering. Recap the key takeaways at the end of the presentation.
2. Give the audience time to read your slides.
3. When using images, videos or gifs:
 - o Describe all images or charts.
 - o Ensure that the video includes captions for hearing impaired attendees.
 - o Introduce or summarize the visual elements of the video or gif for visually impaired attendees.
 - o Consider your language, and identify anything that may be considered exclusionary, offensive or ableist. Use plain language. Refrain from using abbreviations, initializations or acronyms unless they have already been explained to the audience.
4. When taking questions, repeat all questions from the audience before answering.
5. If you are being webcast, look directly into the camera when possible.

Adapted from:

Inclusive Design For Accessible Presentations - <https://www.smashingmagazine.com/2018/11/inclusive-design-accessible-presentations/>

The Ultimate Guide to Accessible Presentation Design - <https://www.stinsondesign.com/blog/ultimate-guide-accessible-presentation-design>

How to design visual learning resources for neurodiverse students - <https://www.fullfabric.com/articles/how-to-design-visual-learning-resources-for-neurodiverse-students>