

How to Host Effective and Accessible Online Meetings With Deaf Participants



Whether you are meeting with colleagues who are working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic or connecting with clients in another state, a little planning can ensure that your next online meeting is effective and accessible to **deaf and hard of hearing people** who will attend.

In addition to helping you run a better meeting, effective communication between hearing and deaf people has benefits for career success. **Research** shows that such communication strengthens relationships, increases well-being, and fosters meaningful participation in the workplace.

These tips from the **National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes** (NDC) can help. And NDC should know—its **team** of more than 25 deaf and hearing professionals works remotely in four different time zones and did so even before the pandemic.

Do a Status Check

Don't think you have a deaf or hard of hearing colleague? You might, especially if your company employs veterans (hearing loss is the **most common** military-related disability). In the meeting invitation, let all of the attendees know the steps you're taking to make the meeting accessible and provide an email address they can use to request additional accommodations.

Remember: One size won't fit all. Deaf people are **diverse** and vary in their **communication preferences**. What worked for in-person meetings may not work online.

Don't feel comfortable being the person to coordinate access and accommodations? Assign an "accessibility advocate" before the meeting to make the arrangements, inform participants of the protocols and details, and monitor live transcriptions, captioning, or other services.

Capitalize on Captions

If you plan on showing any videos during the meeting, make sure the videos are captioned. Research shows that **video captions benefit everyone**. To add captions, **follow industry standards**, check out **DIY captioning resources**, or contact a **captioning vendor**. For videos you produce yourself, be wary of apps or programs that provide auto-generated captions, which are not considered to provide equitable access due to their high error rate.

Make Accommodations

Though **captions help provide equal access**, they may not be enough. In addition to captioning, accommodations that can be provided include an in-person **American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter**, **remote ASL interpreter**, **remote speech-to-text services**, large-print materials, and presentation slides as handouts with presenter notes.

If you are using remote interpreters or service providers, book them at least a week before your meeting, provide them with (and, if possible, test) access to your conferencing platform, and give them any meeting handouts or presentations in advance.

HOW TO HOST EFFECTIVE AND ACCESSIBLE ONLINE MEETINGS WITH DEAF PARTICIPANTS

For your online meeting attendees who use hearing aids or cochlear implants and are struggling with access, these [tips on using hearing assistive technology at home](#) for online meetings and classes can be helpful.

Record and Transcribe Your Meeting

In case there are issues with technology or internet connections, record your online meeting so attendees can rewatch anything they missed.

Some online conferencing platforms can also [automatically transcribe](#) the meeting, or you can have the recording transcribed later. Without editing for accuracy, these types of automatic transcriptions are not considered to provide equitable access because of their high error rate. Read NDC's [Your Questions, Answered](#) feature for more ideas on how to caption video recordings more efficiently.

Establish a Protocol

Just a few online meeting ground rules will reap major benefits. Establish a turn-taking and participation protocol, such as using the raise hand feature, brainstorming in the chat box, or identifying your name before commenting.

If an ASL interpreter or captioner is in the meeting, participants should pause between questions and/or comments to give the interpreter time to catch up. Take care that participants do not talk over one another.

For large meetings, instruct attendees to turn on their video only to ask a question. Limiting the number of participants on screen at the same time can increase video quality and size. The same is true for sound: To reduce background noise, tell attendees to stay in mute mode until they have something to say.

However, if you're meeting with only a handful of people who are remote, you may want to require video. Knowing that everyone can see them helps people stay focused. Plus, it helps people identify more personally with remote colleagues and understand the need for remote interpreters or service providers.

Take a Break

Be mindful of screen fatigue. Attention spans vary greatly from person to person, especially in long presentations and meetings. ASL interpreters also need regularly scheduled breaks, typically every hour.

Share these tips with your fellow meeting hosts, managers, or colleagues. Before you know it, they will become standard meeting protocols that improve everyone's access and success. In need of further assistance? Connect with [NDC](#) or contact its [Help Team](#).



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