

HOW TO MAKE MEETINGS ACCESSIBLE FOR EVERYONE

While business leaders and human resources managers have become increasingly aware of the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEI&B), there's still one aspect of DEI&B that often gets overlooked or inadequately addressed:

accessibility.

As a result, people with disabilities continue to encounter barriers to participation at work.

WHAT IS A DISABILITY?

dis-a-bil-i-ty (dis-ə-'bi-lə-tē)

noun: A condition that impairs a person's ability to perform day-to-day activities

Some are genetic, and some are acquired. Disabilities may be temporary or permanent, and many are invisible. There are many ways organizations can become more accessible for people with disabilities of all kinds

Physical

Cognitive

Sensory

Mental

Intellectual

Learning

Not all disabilities are visible.



THE ONE ASPECT OF WORK THAT IMPACTS ALL EMPLOYEES: MEETINGS

Let's explore meetings through five accessibility lenses:

1 TECHNOLOGY

Challenges

- Some people can't read on-screen text
- Flashing or strobing effects may be uncomfortable for some
- Audio may be difficult or impossible for some to hear



Solutions

- Use PowerPoint's built-in **Accessibility Checker**
- Make sure all pictures and graphics have **alternative text**
- Ensure that all videos have **captions**
- **Provide warnings** for videos that have flashing or strobing effects
- Allow participants to **read the transcript** on their own



2 INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION

Challenges

- People have different learning styles and absorb information differently
- Your meeting might be less effective if it doesn't take this into account



Solutions

- Ask participants **how they prefer to work** and how they'd like to contribute
- **Include visuals** to help convey information
- **Ask participants questions** to check for understanding
- Understand that a **lack of eye contact** doesn't mean someone is disengaged

3 PHYSICAL (BUILT ENVIRONMENT)

Challenges

In-person meeting spaces can pose problems if:

- They have narrow doors that aren't wheelchair-accessible
- They have loud ambient noise or are in high-traffic areas
- Chairs are arranged with poor visibility for lip-readers
- They're offsite at locations that are hard to travel to or park at



Solutions

- Choose locations that are **easy to get to**
- Make sure the space has room for **wheelchairs and mobility devices**
- Arrange chairs so **everyone is visible**



4 ATTITUDES

Challenges

- Using patronizing or ableist language
- Suggesting that those with disabilities can't take on tasks or lead projects
- Resenting those with disabilities who get accommodations



Solutions

- Ask how employees who have disclosed disabilities **would like to be referred to**
- **Ask for suggestions** to make meetings more accessible
- **Don't speak on behalf** of people with disabilities



5 ORGANIZATIONAL OR SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

Challenges

Practices and policies embedded in an organization can contribute to barriers, such as:

- Requiring everyone to attend meetings in person
- Asking people with disabilities to participate in ways that pose challenges for them
- Lacking an accommodation policy

Solutions

- **Revisit meeting practices** and provide options for those who find it challenging to attend in person
- Brainstorm ways to **invite participation**
- Create a **formal policy regarding accommodations** and share it



DIFFERENT TYPES OF MEETINGS

Team Huddles

Quick, focused meetings that serve as check-ins for teams to determine action plans.

Walking Meetings

Meetings designed with wellbeing in mind. However, this style of interaction should be used thoughtfully — be sure that everyone can participate comfortably.

Silent Meetings

A concept that originated at Amazon, where 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.

ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL MEETING: DO'S AND DON'TS

	DO	DON'T
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite people with disabilities to codevelop accessibility policies for meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forget that accessibility is the "unofficial" fifth component of DEI&B
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circulate an agenda at least 24 hours before • Provide instructions and expectations in advance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule during typical commuting hours • Have a meeting if you don't need to
Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce new people • Offer a variety of formats for participating (e.g., sharing ideas in writing instead of speaking) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put anyone on the spot by asking them to discuss their disability • Forget to provide breaks
Meeting Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use plain language, avoiding jargon • Use inclusive language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use handouts that are low-contrast • Choose hard-to-read fonts — studies show Helvetica, Arial, Courier, and Verdana are best
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that captions are turned on • Record the meeting to create a meeting transcript 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use tools that are mouse-dependent or don't have keyboard shortcuts

IN CONCLUSION ...

Meetings are one of the principal ways that an organization communicates with its employees.

That's why they must be all-embracing in every sense — including accessibility.

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

- [JAN Workplace Accommodation Toolkit](#)
- [Office of Disability Employment Policy](#)
- [The ADA: Your Employment Rights as an Individual With a Disability](#)
- [6 Ways to Start Thinking About Workplace Accessibility Right Now](#)
- [To Accommodate or Not to Accommodate — Hiding Disabilities in the Workplace](#)

