

Draft Guidance for Committee Chairs
How to Host an Accessible Remote Meeting
For Legislative Staff

This document is created to support Washington State Legislators who are Committee Chairs in conducting accessible hearings, work sessions, and remote testimony. This guidance was drafted by Disability Rights Washington and based on a Rooted in Rights Blog post called "[How to Make Your Virtual Meetings and Events Accessible to the Disability Community](#)" by Alaina Leary. For more resources and tips watch "[Make Your Video Calls Accessible](#)" by Rooted in Rights or contact [Darya Farivar](#) at Disability Rights Washington.

Before Remote Meetings and Hearings

- **Offer technical assistance, interpretation, and accommodations-** Make it clear that interpretation and accommodations are available upon request, and be prepared to respond promptly and individually. The legislature moves quickly and with little notice, because of this accommodation and interpretation requests may also give staff little notice to prepare. To be responsive, consider identifying a designated person, a plan, and a list of available resources before the session starts. Allow for ease of access by posting the contact information of ADA coordinators and where to request spoken language interpretation on all hearing notices.
- **"Individualize" the response to requests.** It is also important to realize that disability and language access cannot be accommodated in a "one size fits all" manner, and inquire individually with persons requesting accommodation. For example, individuals who are Deaf, Late-Deafened, Hard of Hearing, and Speech-Disabled may require a variety of accommodations – sign language interpreter, Deaf-Blind interpretation, Computer Assisted Real-Time Translation (CART), etc. – depending upon the individual. Ask the disabled person what accommodations work best for them.
- **Provide a call-in option-** Use a platform that provides the option to call into meetings using a phone. This allows those without internet access to participate. Additionally, some [assistive devices](#) work through a phone but not a computer. Individuals can also call in through the phone number to get the sound while joining online to get the visual. It is, however, up to the individual to determine what device they will use to participate.
- **Don't use a passcode-** Create meeting invitations without passwords or join codes to reduce the number of steps needed to join the meeting. Another way to reduce barriers is by changing the settings to automatically have participant videos on and unmuted.
- **Provide agendas and documents in an accessible format, different languages, and in advance-** This way participants can review at their speed, and have the time necessary to ensure they have effective access. Where participants are using assistive devices they can access presentation materials directly on their computers. Zoom functions can be accessed by [screen readers](#), but this does not include presentation materials that are being screen shared. If you are sending presentations beforehand ensure they are in an [accessible format](#). For example, PDFs can flatten text so screen readers cannot access them while Microsoft Word or HTML files are widely accessible.

- **Plan with access as a priority-** There are small things we can all do that contribute to a more accessible environment for everyone, not just people with disabilities. It's best to plan with [inclusive design principles](#) in mind so that everyone can participate. For example, if alternate ways of presenting information are needed to make the document accessible consider modifying it to be fully accessible so only one document is needed or provide alternate formats to everyone, not just people who request a different format.
- **Identify interpretation and accommodation resources and know-how to use them.** In advance of the meeting, make sure accommodation providers are available if needed. For example, sign language interpreters and CART providers must be scheduled *before* the meeting occurs to ensure availability. It is also helpful to provide agendas and documents to the interpreters and providers before the meeting so they understand the context. Different meeting platforms have different features and it's important to use one that will allow participants or viewers to keep an ASL interpreter on screen at an appropriate size and also work with spoken language interpretation. Be sure to provide instructions in advance if individuals will need to navigate technology to use the accommodations. There is expertise available for consultation on accommodation issues. For example, the Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) and Northwest ADA Center.
- **Specify if public comment is available-** The agenda should state whether or not there will be public comment and how individuals can make arrangements to provide testimony during the hearing or work session.
- **Provide options for those unavailable during the day-** Many individuals have work or caregiving responsibilities that they cannot avoid. Post the meeting information as far in advance as possible so they can plan accordingly and provide ways to participate for people who cannot join in real-time.

After Remote Meetings and Hearings

- **Provide notes or the transcript-** This allows individuals to participate in the discussion rather than worry about taking notes. Ensure that the notes are accessible by a screen reader, and in an audio format where requested.
- **Provide opportunities for feedback-** It's always great to have an opportunity to provide feedback on accessible and inaccessible components of meetings. This helps organizers grow from the experience and improve their understanding of access. We recommend providing a survey, with the option for anonymity, at the end of the remote meeting or hearing where participants can share feedback on whether the meeting was accessible, what worked and what was a barrier, and suggestions for improvement.