

10

actionable and easy-to-implement tips on how to make online workshops more accessible and inclusive for participants with disabilities



Leading in
disability inclusive
development



1 Before every (virtual) meeting, ask about any accessibility requirements

Why this matters:

You can't possibly know potential disabilities of every audience you are working with. Equally, you should not expect participants with disabilities to always reach out to facilitators/organizers themselves.

Additional tips & resources:

Add a small footnote in your invitation asking about any accessibility requirements. If you send out a pre-survey assessing participants' expectations anyways, include an extra question there.

2 Send out presentations/input in an accessible format – before the workshop

Why this matters:

People with disabilities need to manage a lot during a virtual workshop. Pre-reading the input they will work with in workshops allows them (and their assistants) to prepare properly.

Additional tips & resources:

Most tools (such as Microsoft Office, Adobe) have a built-in functionality to automatically check for accessibility. See this [Accessibility functionality overview](#).

3 Check whether the tools you are using are accessible

Why this matters:

Some online tools are designed to be easily navigated by e.g., people with no or low vision. Others are not – and thus prevent people with disabilities to participate.

Additional tips & resources:

For example, Zoom and PollEverywhere are accessible tools, online whiteboards such as Mural are usually not (but breakout groups with people willing to support might be a workaround). If you are not sure, ask participants with disabilities to test it with you before the workshop.

4 Establish inclusive rules for all participants

Why this matters:

There is a lot that participants themselves can do to create an inclusive online workshop – they just need to be informed about these extra steps to take

Additional tips & resources:

Show a slide with ground rules and include at least the following rules:

- Before each contribution, every participant should say their name for persons who are blind to know who is speaking
- Everyone should have proper lighting for hard of hearing persons to see lip movements

5 Regularly check in with participants with disabilities

Why this matters:

Participating in an online workshop can be quite a challenge for people with disabilities. Take the extra burden off their shoulders and make it routine to proactively ask whether they can follow and feel included.

Additional tips & resources:

After around 30 minutes, quickly ask participants with disabilities whether they can follow – and what you could do to improve their experience. You can also offer prioritised communication channels between you and persons with disabilities, e.g. via WhatsApp.

6 Provide sensory breaks

Why this matters:

For participants with a lower threshold for sensory overload or when using additional translation services (sign- or other languages), constant input and activation can be overwhelming. As facilitator, you might risk to lose them.

Additional tips & resources:

Give everyone a couple of minutes from time to time to take a breath without any sensory input. Sensory breaks can also naturally be included as part of workshop activities. Check out [this activity](#) from Liberating Structures where individual reflection time is integrated.

7 Verbalize visual cues as much as possible

Why this matters:

While blind participants can read well with assistive tools such as screen readers, there are many things happening on the screen that they cannot capture.

Additional tips & resources:

As a rule of thumb, try to verbalize everything that is not captured in text form: Objects you are referring to in a presentation, steps you are taking as a facilitator (“I am now sharing my screen with presentation x”) – and reactions such as smiles from other participants.

8 Use supportive technology – if helpful

Why this matters:

Virtual workshops also provide the opportunity to leverage technology that you would not be able to access during in-person workshops.

Additional tips & resources:

Many videoconferencing tools provide closed captioning services. You can also use AI-generated subtitles in PPT and MS Teams. See links here for MS [PowerPoint](#), [MS Teams](#) or [Zoom](#). Still: A facilitator's empathy is often more effective than technology.

9 Improve continuously from feedback

Why this matters:

There should be no limit when it comes to inclusion. As a facilitator for online workshops with participants with disabilities, learn from your and others' experience.

Additional tips & resources:

Check in individually with persons with disabilities after your workshop and ask them about their experience.

Specifically ask: How did it feel for you? What were instances where you did not feel included? What could I have done differently

10 Educate yourself about the reality of persons with disabilities

Why this matters:

In our society, there is still limited awareness about the experience of people with disabilities; especially when it comes to the challenges they are facing when they navigate online (workshops). As a facilitator of online workshops, you have a special responsibility to create an inclusive environment for all – and this starts with awareness.

Additional tips & resources:

First and foremost, engage in self-learning. There are great resources online. Ever wondered what it's like to browse the internet as a blind person? Check out [this video](#). In addition, engage directly with persons with disabilities to learn from and with them.

? You have questions or additional tips to share?

Please reach out to us!



Susanne Fengler

Head of Political work and Technical
Advisory

CBM Christian Blind Mission

Michael.Herbst@cbm.org



Marius Möhler

Project manager and facilitator

LEAD Mindsets & Capabilities

www.linkedin.com/in/mariusmoehler

marius.moehler@lead.berlin