

Accessible Meetings Checklist

A comprehensive checklist for making DSD meetings accessible — covering virtual meetings, in-person meetings, and hybrid formats. This checklist addresses captioning, ASL interpretation requests, materials distributed in advance, accessible venue criteria, sensory accommodations, breaks, and the full arc from pre-meeting planning through follow-up. It is organized in three phases: Before the Meeting, During the Meeting, and After the Meeting.

Content

Accessible Meetings Checklist

Resource type: Tier 1 Flagship — Accessibility

Library home: L09 Accessibility & Plain Language Library

Companion to: WCAG 2.2 AA Flagship Module; Accessible Communications Checklist; Sensory Accommodations Walk-Through; Effective Communication for People with Communication Disabilities

Standards reference: WCAG 2.2 AA; Title II ADA (Effective Communication); §504 Rehabilitation Act; Minnesota Human Rights Act (MHRA); DSD Equity and Inclusion principles

What this is

A comprehensive checklist for making DSD meetings accessible — covering virtual meetings, in-person meetings, and hybrid formats. This checklist addresses captioning, ASL interpretation requests, materials distributed in advance, accessible venue criteria, sensory accommodations, breaks, and the full arc from pre-meeting planning through follow-up. It is organized in three phases: Before the Meeting, During the Meeting, and After the Meeting.

Why this matters for DSD

DSD staff facilitate hundreds of meetings every year — service planning meetings, team meetings, trainings, public forums, stakeholder engagements, and individual consultations. When meetings are not accessible:

- Staff with hearing disabilities cannot follow the discussion
- Staff with visual disabilities cannot access visual materials shared in the meeting
- People with cognitive disabilities are overwhelmed by dense, unstructured presentations
- People who use sign language and do not read lips well are excluded without ASL interpretation
- People with sensory sensitivities are physically unable to attend or participate comfortably
- People with mobility disabilities cannot access venues with barriers

The ADA's Title II Effective Communication requirement applies to DSD's meetings. When a person with a

communication disability needs an auxiliary aid or service to communicate effectively, DSD must provide it — at no cost to the individual — unless it would impose an undue burden or fundamentally alter the program. The person's preference for the type of aid must receive primary consideration.

Meeting accessibility is not a courtesy — it is a legal and ethical obligation.

The core requirements

All DSD meetings must:

1. Include an accessibility accommodation request process in all invitations
2. Allow sufficient advance notice for accommodation requests
3. Use captioning for all virtual meetings and large in-person meetings
4. Provide meeting materials in advance (at least 48 hours)
5. Use accessible document formats for all shared materials
6. Follow a clear, predictable agenda structure
7. Offer breaks in meetings longer than 60 minutes
8. Use inclusive facilitation practices
9. Provide follow-up materials in accessible formats

Before the Meeting

Step 1: Include an Accommodation Request Notice in All Invitations

Every meeting invitation — whether for a large public forum or a small team meeting — must include a way for participants to request accommodations.

Minimum required text in invitations:

"If you need an accommodation to participate in this meeting, please contact [name] at [phone] or [email] by [date — at least 5 business days before the meeting]. Accommodations may include ASL interpretation, CART captioning, materials in alternative formats, a sign language interpreter, or other supports. Requests submitted with less than [5] business days' notice will be honored if possible; the more advance notice you provide, the more easily we can arrange what you need."

Key elements:

- Named contact person (not just a general inbox)
- Both phone and email options
- Deadline for requests that allows planning time (5 business days is a minimum; 10 business days or more is better for complex accommodations)
- Non-exhaustive examples of accommodations (do not limit what people can request)
- A note that last-minute requests will be made in good faith

Common error: Putting accommodation request information at the bottom of an invitation in small print.

Fix: Make the accommodation notice a clearly visible section near the top of every invitation.

Step 2: Process Accommodation Requests

When an accommodation request comes in:

1. Acknowledge receipt within one business day
2. Confirm what can be provided and by when
3. If the specific accommodation cannot be provided, engage the person in finding an effective alternative
4. Do not assume what accommodation a person needs — let them specify
5. Never ask for a diagnosis or medical documentation for reasonable accommodations — ask only for information about what is needed to participate effectively
6. Log accommodation requests in your meeting file for continuity and planning purposes

Step 3: Arrange ASL Interpretation

ASL interpretation is a common and legally required accommodation for meetings involving Deaf people who use American Sign Language.

Key steps:

1. Contact a qualified ASL interpreter service as soon as you receive the request — qualified interpreters book quickly, especially for specialized or technical content
2. Provide the interpreter with the meeting agenda, key terminology, and any documents that will be discussed, at least 24 hours in advance
3. For virtual meetings: arrange for the interpreter to be on camera at all times; use Spotlight in Microsoft Teams or Zoom to pin the interpreter's video
4. For in-person meetings: position the interpreter in the signer's direct line of sight, near the primary speaker, with good lighting — never against a window
5. For meetings longer than 90 minutes: arrange two interpreters who rotate every 30 minutes (interpreting is cognitively intense and accuracy declines with fatigue)

Minnesota resources for ASL interpretation:

- DSD's contract interpretation services (contact the DSD Equity Team for current contractors)
- Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind & Hard of Hearing: <https://mn.gov/deaf-commission/>
- Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID): <https://rid.org/>

Note on video relay interpreting (VRI): VRI (video-based remote interpreting) is an alternative when an in-person interpreter is not available. It is not always equally effective — it can fail when the participant has difficulty seeing the screen, when lighting is poor, or when the content is very technical. Always discuss VRI suitability with the participant.

Step 4: Arrange CART Captioning

CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) provides real-time text transcription of spoken content. It is essential for people who are deaf or hard of hearing but do not use sign language, and beneficial for many others.

Key steps:

1. Contact a qualified CART provider as soon as you receive the request
2. Provide the CART provider with the agenda, glossary of key terms, proper nouns (names, programs, legislation), and any prepared remarks
3. For virtual meetings: share the CART stream URL with the participant; many CART providers can also integrate with Teams or Zoom
4. For in-person meetings: arrange a display screen for the participant to view the CART output; position it in their line of sight
5. Request a transcript of the CART output for post-meeting follow-up

Auto-generated captions vs. CART:

Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Google Meet all offer auto-generated live captions. These are not a substitute for CART when a participant has requested CART as an accommodation. Auto-captions have error rates that vary with accents, technical vocabulary, and audio quality. CART captioners achieve accuracy rates above 98% and can be corrected in real time. Use auto-captions as a supplemental tool; use CART as the accommodation.

Step 5: Prepare and Distribute Materials in Advance

All meeting materials — agendas, presentations, documents, reports — must be distributed to participants at least 48 hours before the meeting. For participants using screen readers or Braille displays, earlier distribution (5–7 days) is better — navigating complex documents with assistive technology takes more time.

Material requirements:

- All documents in accessible formats (Word with accessibility checked, tagged PDF — not scanned PDFs or images)
- Presentation slides shared as accessible PowerPoint or accessible PDF — not as an image or a printed handout only
- Agendas formatted with clear headings and times
- If video will be shown, provide captioned versions in advance

Why in advance matters: Participants with visual disabilities, cognitive disabilities, or processing differences need time to review materials before the meeting. Handing out a complex report at the start of a meeting and immediately discussing it excludes people who cannot absorb complex information in real time.

Step 6: Assess Venue Accessibility (In-Person Meetings)

For in-person meetings, verify the following before confirming the location:

Physical access:

- [] Building entrance is accessible (no steps, or step-free alternative is clearly marked and not a service entrance)

- ☐ Accessible parking within reasonable proximity
- ☐ Path from parking to meeting room is accessible (no stairs, no heavy doors without automatic openers)
- ☐ Elevator available if meeting room is not on ground floor (and elevator is working — check day-of)
- ☐ Meeting room door is wide enough for wheelchairs (minimum 32 inches clear; 36 inches preferred)
- ☐ Accessible restroom on the same floor as the meeting room

Meeting room:

- ☐ Table and chair setup allows wheelchair users to sit at the table with all other participants — not at the side or end
- ☐ Assistive listening system (hearing loop/induction loop, or FM system) available and working — required for groups of 50 or more under ADA standards; recommended for smaller groups when requested
- ☐ Lighting is adequate (not fluorescent flicker; not too dim; natural light supplemented)
- ☐ Space is quiet — not adjacent to loud machinery, HVAC units, or high-traffic areas
- ☐ Room temperature is comfortable and adjustable
- ☐ Accessible seating options (chairs with armrests, chairs at different heights)

Common error: Booking a venue without checking for elevators or accessible restrooms, and discovering barriers on the day of the meeting. Fix: Always do a physical accessibility walk-through or request an accessibility confirmation from the venue in writing before booking.

Step 7: Plan the Agenda for Accessibility

Accessible agendas:

- Are shared in advance in accessible format
- List start and end times for the meeting and for each major item
- Identify who will speak on each item
- Include scheduled breaks (for meetings over 60 minutes)
- Note when materials will be distributed or demonstrated
- Are simple and clear — no abbreviations or internal shorthand without explanation

During the Meeting

Step 8: Open with Accessibility Orientation

Begin every meeting with a brief accessibility orientation (30–60 seconds):

- Confirm that CART, ASL interpretation, or other accommodations are functioning
- Identify the interpreter and captioner to all participants
- Remind participants to speak one at a time (for captioning accuracy and interpretation clarity)
- Share how participants can signal that they want to speak (raise hand button, physical hand raise, or unmute)
- Note the location of accessible restrooms (in-person meetings)
- Remind participants of the break schedule

Step 9: Inclusive Facilitation Practices

Speaking practices:

- Speak clearly, at a moderate pace
- Face the group — do not speak while turned to the whiteboard or screen
- Identify yourself before speaking ("This is [Name]") in large virtual meetings where screen readers cannot identify speakers
- Do not talk over each other — wait for the previous speaker to finish before speaking
- Repeat or summarize audience questions and comments before responding (improves captioning and allows remote participants to hear)

Visual practices:

- Describe all visual content verbally: "The slide shows a bar chart comparing enrollment across five programs. The highest enrollment is in CDCS, with 1,240 participants."
- Do not reference visuals with only spatial language: "as you can see here" or "the thing on the left" — describe what it shows
- Read key text from slides or documents aloud

Participation practices:

- Use multiple modes for participation: verbal, chat, written questions
- Give processing time before expecting responses — do not rush people
- Use the raise-hand function in virtual meetings consistently
- Allow participants who use AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) devices adequate time to compose and share their message

Step 10: Manage Sensory Environment (In-Person)

- Keep the room at a comfortable, stable temperature
- Dim or adjust overhead lighting if requested by a participant with sensory sensitivity — provide reading lights as supplemental lighting
- Minimize background noise (close doors, turn off HVAC noise where possible)
- Do not use scented sprays, strong air fresheners, or perfumed products in or near the meeting room (request this from all participants in the invitation)
- Have a designated quiet space nearby if participants need a sensory break

Step 11: Take and Track Breaks

For meetings over 60 minutes:

- Schedule a 10-minute break at the 60-minute mark
- For meetings over 2 hours: schedule breaks every 60 minutes
- Break times should be clearly communicated at the start of the meeting and on the agenda
- Breaks support cognitive accessibility (sustained attention has limits for everyone, particularly for people with ADHD, autism, or traumatic brain injuries), physical accessibility (people who need to move, stretch, or use medical devices), and interpreter and captioner sustainability

After the Meeting

Step 12: Distribute Accessible Follow-Up Materials

Within 24–48 hours of the meeting, send:

- Meeting summary or minutes in accessible Word or tagged PDF format
- Any presentations shared during the meeting in accessible PowerPoint or PDF
- Any action items with clear ownership and due dates
- CART transcript (if applicable) for participants who requested it or who missed content

For participants who missed part of the meeting due to an accessibility barrier: Follow up individually and offer to walk through key decisions or content.

Step 13: Follow Up on Accommodation Quality

After the meeting, check in briefly with participants who received accommodations:

- Did the interpretation or captioning meet your needs?
- Were there any barriers we should address for the next meeting?
- Is there anything we can do better?

This feedback improves future meetings and demonstrates that DSD takes accessibility seriously as an ongoing practice, not a one-time checkbox.

ASL Interpretation Request Process Summary

Step — Action — Timeline

- 1 — Participant requests ASL interpretation in the accommodation notice — "e5 business days before meeting
- 2 — DSD staff acknowledges request within 1 business day — Within 1 business day of request
- 3 — DSD contacts interpreter service and books qualified interpreter — As soon as possible after request
- 4 — DSD provides interpreter with advance materials — "e24 hours before meeting
- 5 — DSD confirms interpreter logistics with participant — "e48 hours before meeting
- 6 — Meeting opens with accessibility orientation — First 2 minutes of meeting
- 7 — DSD follow up with participant on quality — Within 24 hours after meeting

Common Errors and How to Fix Them

Error — Impact — Fix

No accommodation request notice in invitation — Participants cannot request what they need — Add accommodation notice to every invitation template

Short notice for accommodation requests — Interpreters and CART providers unavailable — Build 5–10 business day lead time into invitation templates

Materials distributed at meeting start — Screen reader/Braille users excluded from real-time discussion — Send accessible materials 48+ hours in advance

Auto-captions treated as CART — Accuracy too low for substantive meetings — Arrange qualified CART when requested; use auto-captions as supplement

Venue not checked for accessibility — Physical barriers prevent attendance — Do accessibility walk-through or get written confirmation before booking

No breaks in long meetings — Participants with fatigue, pain, or cognitive needs cannot sustain participation — Schedule 10-minute breaks every 60 minutes

Visuals not described verbally — Blind and low-vision participants miss content — Describe all slides and visual content in words during the meeting

ASL interpreter not spotted in virtual meeting — Deaf participants cannot see interpreter — Use Spotlight/Pin to fix interpreter video on screen

No follow-up materials — Participants who missed content cannot catch up — Send accessible summary within 24–48 hours of every meeting

Where to Get Help

- ADA National Network — Meeting Accessibility: <https://adata.org/>
- ADA.gov — Effective Communication: <https://www.ada.gov/resources/effective-communication/>
- Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind & Hard of Hearing: <https://mn.gov/deaf-commission/>
- Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf: <https://rid.org/>
- Microsoft Teams Accessibility Features: <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/accessibility-overview-of-microsoft-teams>
- One DSD Equity Team: Accommodation request support, interpreter and CART coordination

Connection to DSD's Six Program Goals

DSD Program Goal — Accessible Meetings Connection

Equity and inclusion — Accessible meetings ensure all staff and community members can participate fully

Cultural and linguistic competence — Interpretation and multilingual accommodation support diverse linguistic communities

Olmstead implementation — Service planning meetings for people with disabilities must themselves be accessible

Workforce development — Staff with disabilities need accessible team meetings, trainings, and all-staff events

Quality improvement — Accessible meetings produce better decisions because all perspectives are heard

Leadership and accountability — Leaders are accountable for the accessibility of every meeting they facilitate

Sources

- ADA.gov — Effective Communication: <https://www.ada.gov/resources/effective-communication/>
- ADA National Network — Accessible Meetings Fact Sheet: <https://adata.org/>

- Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind & Hard of Hearing: <https://mn.gov/deaf-commission/>
- Section508.gov — Creating Accessible Meetings: <https://www.section508.gov/>
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2, W3C, December 2024: <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG22/>
- DOJ ADA Title Two Web and Mobile App Accessibility Final Rule, April 2024: <https://www.ada.gov/resources/2024-03-08-web-rule/>
- Microsoft Teams Accessibility: <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/accessibility-overview-of-microsoft-teams>

Accessibility is everyone's responsibility. When in doubt, ask people with disabilities what works for them.

Include an accessibility accommodation request process in all invitations

Use captioning for all virtual meetings and large in-person meetings

Provide meeting materials in advance (at least 48 hours)

Use accessible document formats for all shared materials

Follow a clear, predictable agenda structure

Offer breaks in meetings longer than 60 minutes

Use inclusive facilitation practices

For consultant operations, use Accessible Meetings Checklist to prepare the agenda, participation methods, access supports, decision points, and follow-up; adapt the guidance to the request, test assumptions, document advice, and route authority questions. Start by include an accessibility accommodation request process in all invitations

Do not replace official legal, policy, clinical, supervisory, program, or Tribal authority.

Do not infer an individual's identity, preferences, needs, or experience from group-level information.

State uncertainty, use current authoritative sources, and escalate when the decision exceeds the user's role.

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