



TIP SHEET

DESIGNING SECURE AND ACCESSIBLE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS: Fostering Inclusion and Preventing Harassment

PURPOSE

With the growing proliferation of remote work, eLearning, and online community, there are so many great new ways to connect and collaborate with each other. However, with these shifts also come new opportunities for us to be intentional so we create the most accessible, inclusive, and secure spaces possible. There are so many great resources to leverage and review as we navigate this evolving landscape such as Nova Scotia's Guide to Planning Accessible Online Meetings and Events and Feminuity's Guide for Inclusive and Accessible Virtual Presentations.

From exclusionary interactions to unexpected intrusion from uninvited and hateful users, there are meaningful ways we can proactively protect virtual settings from harm. This tip sheet outlines important actions that hosts can take to promote welcoming and affirming virtual environments for colleagues and guests. As stewards of our virtual spaces, hosts should take seriously their responsibility to discuss safety concerns and implement deliberate safety and inclusion measures for our guests and attendees.

PRACTICES

PRE-MEETING

1. Don't share Zoom meeting link or Meeting ID for your events in public forums.
2. To reduce the risk of uninvited guests, share link just before the event. Use a unique Meeting ID and password for every meeting or event.
3. Use the "Waiting Room" and ensure that attendees cannot join before the host(s). Start your event 10-15 minutes before the start time so that there is time to approve guests before the meeting.
4. Disable "Join Before Host": This should be disabled by default, but make sure your meeting does not allow attendees to join before the host.
5. If possible, enable live captioning and transcription in administrative settings which enhances accessibility (e.g., People who are deaf, language learners, neurodivergent people, etc.)
 - a. Enable Captions on Zoom
 - b. Enable Captions on Microsoft Teams
 - c. Enable Captions on Google Meet
6. If possible, adjust administrative settings so people can change their videoconferencing username or add pronouns. This will make the space more inclusive for transgender, non-binary, genderfluid, and nonconforming participants.
 - a. In Zoom, this is possible by selecting the three dots in the upper-right corner of your videoconferencing window and clicking "Rename"
7. Before the meeting, try to test your audio to ensure it is coming through crisp and clear for greater accessibility.
8. Try to be aware of any mental health (e.g., counseling services) and crisis (e.g., hotlines) resources before the meeting so you can share them if someone is feeling triggered or distressed.
9. If this event involves invited speakers, have a discussion with them about safety. Share the tipsheet with them in advance.



IN MEETING

1. Designate at least two users as “Co-hosts” who are familiar with your safety protocols to help you monitor attendees, troubleshoot technical difficulties, and address emergent accessibility needs.
2. Turn Volume Off for All Participants: The host or co-hosts can go to the Participants List, scroll down to the bottom, and turn the volume off for attendees in the meeting. This makes it so participants can’t use their microphone in ways that might disrupt your event audio.
3. Think about what functions you need the meeting to have and only allow these functions. You have control over screen sharing, private chatting, annotation tools, file transfers.
4. Begin the event or meeting with a land acknowledgement from one of the hosts.
5. If time allows and as appropriate, align on or collaboratively establish Working Agreements for the space (e.g. assume goodwill, be as present as possible, keep vulnerable stories or conversations confidential outside meetings, share the mic, etc.)
 - a. Share that attendees should avoid the use of obscenities, personal attacks, threats, harassment, discriminatory language, trolling, hate speech, impersonation, inappropriate or abusive content, and defamatory comments about any person, group, organization, or belief.
 - b. Share that attendees should refrain from overly critical interactions designed to punish, shame, humiliate, or isolate each other. Enable space for vulnerability, courageous dialogue, building mutual understanding, and learning.
6. If functionally feasible, encourage participants to add their pronouns beside their name if they feel comfortable doing so to make sure everyone is referring to each other in the most affirming ways possible.
7. As much as possible, try to share the literal and plain meaning of idioms (e.g., piece of cake), jargon (e.g., acronym everyone might not be familiar with), and figurative language/ metaphors when presenting to be more inclusive of language learners and neurodivergent attendees.
8. Try to describe any important, non-decorative images (e.g., graphs) that you reference when presenting to be more inclusive of blind and low-vision attendees, and those tuning in via audio only.
9. Use the most unbiased, affirming, and inclusive language possible (.e.g. Hello Everyone! instead of Hello Guys!) to not alienate, erase, or offend people of different backgrounds, identities, and lived experiences.
10. As much as is feasible, offer multiple forums and mediums for sharing during interactive events. Some people will feel most comfortable and organic sharing verbally by turning on their volume, some by writing in the chat, and some by sharing anonymously (e.g., confidential Question and Answer (Q&A) feature). If possible, leave room for all of these methods of participation so every voice can be acknowledged.
11. Try to include content warnings for topics and imagery that could produce serious emotional reactions for different people, such as for content related to suicide, self-harm, disordered eating, violence, death, sexual assault, abuse, offensive/derogatory language, discrimination, and offensive terms.

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12. Prior to the meeting and/or before share guidelines for expected behaviour.
 - a. At the Sheridan KMDC we share. “As we discuss equity, diversity and inclusion in the workplace from different perspectives, cultures, and levels of knowledge, we wish to foster an inclusive and open environment for all participants. We strive to create an atmosphere where everyone can freely participate, ask questions, and engage in meaningful conversations. To achieve this, we must maintain a harassment-free and inclusive environment that recognizes and respects the inherent value of every individual. It is expected that all participants will be mindful and considerate in their interactions to ensure that everyone feels valued. We encourage all attendees to work with us in creating a positive and secure experience for everyone. We do not tolerate harassment in any form. Those who exhibit harmful behavior may be asked to leave the event”.
 13. If the chat is open, make sure one person monitors it.
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AFTER THE MEETING

1. Evaluation of events should query the inclusiveness, accessibility, and safety of the online event so we can learn and iterate from constructive feedback. If you have recorded a guest speaker, disable comments and/or consider making the comments private. People who miss the event will likely return to the recording two or three weeks after it becomes available.
2. If something especially offensive, hateful, triggering, or distressing occurred during the event –hosts should follow up with attendees by sharing organizational and community mental health resources and being as transparent as possible about actions being taken to address issue.

Find out more about Zoom’s security protocols:

- Best Practices for Securing Zoom Meetings
- Zoom Security Guide
- Privacy & Security for Zoom Video Communications

‘How to’ and helpful videos for all your Zoom questions:
Show Me Videos - Zoom Learning Center

Sheridan



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