Accessibility Check-In

Purpose

By asking everyone to share their needs, we take the burden of disrupting ableism off those who are made vulnerable by it. Because disabilities can be invisible or temporary, we normalize the idea that you can't know someone's accessibility needs simply by observing them. We create a welcoming and inclusive environment that doesn't make neurodiverse and disabled peoples feel "othered". Accessibility check-ins allow each of us to acknowledge the unique needs our bodies present at any moment, empowering us to collectively address barriers to our shared participation. This improves meeting systems, structures and norms for everyone, not just disabled and neurodiverse peoples.

Protocol

The accessibility check-in will occur when PHB staff facilitate the roll call. Each person will be asked to state that they are present, their pronouns, and their accessibility needs. Some examples of accessibility needs are:

"As a participant with hearing issues, I might need you to repeat language and I'll signal with my hand to let you know."

"I'm in a location today that prevents me from using video and talking. I will be communicating via the chat today."

"As a participant who is visually impaired, I need you to repeat your name each time you speak."

"My mobility issues necessitate that I stretch my legs often, so my camera will remain off."

While this activity is meant to equalize access in the room, it is important to keep in mind your boundaries and level of comfortability. Do not feel pressured to share anything that you are not comfortable with the group knowing, or comfortable with being recorded and existing as a public record.

If you do not have any accessibility needs/concerns, simply state, "All of my access needs have been met at this time." This makes clear what is working in the space and equalizes power.

PHB staff will make note of any accessibility needs, providing accommodations when possible and facilitating the conversation in a manner fitting to the requests of the room. Staff will also state what accessibility features are being used at the beginning of the meeting as well, so it is clear what will be provided.

It is also recommended that each participant say their name before they ask questions or offer comment. This will help the visually impaired understand who is speaking and allow the participant to reintroduce themselves to the room.

Some further actions you can take to ensure a more accessible and inviting space include:

- Limiting your use of acronyms or idioms
- Use of the 'Raise Hand' feature when you would like to speak or ask a question
- Not speaking over anyone, respecting each other's space and opinions, and ensuring that there is only one speaker at a time
- Appropriate use of the 'Chat' feature

Use of the Chat Feature

The chat feature should be used sparingly in meetings, as it often can become hard to track and distracting. However, there are appropriate uses of the feature, which can and should be utilized when necessary. Some best practices are listed below:

- The chat feature should only be utilized by PHB staff and RSC Commissioners, not by the public.
- At the beginning of the meeting, one of the Executivee Committee Members will be designated "chat moderator"
- During long discussion periods, PHB staff will periodically check in with the chat moderator to get an oral recap of comments and discussion in the chat. A recap will be done every 10 – 15 minutes.
- Staff will only verbatim repeat comments left in the chat by Commissioners who indicated during the accessibility check in that this is an accommodation that they need. Staff will attempt to read these chat messages as close to real time as possible by using the raise their hand feature in order to not interrupt the flow of the meeting.
- Staff will continue to answer questions posed in the chat to the best of their ability.
- Side conversations should not be occurring in the chat, particularly during public testimony. Please limit chat use to on-topic items at the appropriate time.

When the above best practices are followed, the chat feature can add a level of accessibility to the meeting. With this in mind, please don't hesitate to use the chat if you are unavailable to speak up or are uncomfortable verbalizing your question or opinions.

Questions

- What current accessibility features are we using?
  - Captions?
  - Keyboard Accessibility?
  - Automatic Transcripts?
  - Screen Reader Support: Integration with screen reader technology
  - Magnifiers

Sources

https://callingupjustice.com/accessibility-check-in/

https://www.americanbar.org/groups/diversity/disabilityrights/resources/covid-resources/virtual-meetings-checklist/

https://disabilityin.org/resource/six-tips-to-keep-in-mind-when-creating-accessible-virtual-meetings/

https://www.levelaccess.com/blog/how-to-make-virtual-meetings-accessible/

Protocol Checklist

- Establish Quorum
- Roll Call
    - State that you are present
    - Pronouns
    - Accessibility check-in
        - PHB Staff make note of these
- Proper Use of the Chat
- Current Accessibility Functions
    - Captions?
    - Keyboard Accessibility?
    - Automatic Transcripts?
    - Screen Reader Support: Integration with screen reader technology
    - Magnifiers
    - Limiting use of acronyms or idioms
    - Use raise hand feature
    - One person talks at a time
    - State name before each comment
- Staff/Department Updates