Accessibility in the time of COVID-19

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As the impact of COVID-19 continues to widen, and the need for alternative programming continues to stretch out before us, please keep accessibility in the forefront of your mind when planning and disseminating program materials. Be it virtual, video, or print materials, consider how your programming may be used or accessed by folks with a variety of needs or circumstances. The reality is that individuals with disabilities are often disproportionately impacted by emergencies. We also know that a mobile device may be the only access to the internet, and we are aware of the realities of limited bandwidth. With so many different needs and different circumstances to consider, there is no time like the present to ensure that what is being put out there works for as many users as possible. The following tips will ensure accessibility for online programming or documents.

1. **Provide clear structure of content**. Make any products simple and intuitive. Directions should be clear and organized. Use plain language. Distance often requires more structure than face to face programming, as there less interaction. Additionally, knowing the expected outcomes helps increase focus and learning. Strong and simple organization allow users to succeed accessing the material the first time, whenever and wherever that may be.

2. **Caption videos.** When the Division of Extension creates any public facing media, it needs to have captioning and alternate text for images to be compliant with a few different federal laws. Only time-synced and verbatim captions provide truly equitable access. As such, professional, quality captions are required and can be acquired through contracted vendors. There are tools for captioning videos yourself, but that is only suggested only for short videos. Two external tools you may consider for independently captioning short videos are the following: CADET Tool and Section 508 Accessibility Training Videos

3. **Describe images.** Images, tables, infographics, and other visuals can be excellent tools for conveying knowledge in videos, PowerPoints, and documents. They can increase focus and distill complicated information, so while their use is encouraged, images must be described when they appear on screen. This is true for presentations (live or recorded) or when sharing any document. This includes not only giving a physical description of the image but covering the content and function of the image.

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4. **Create accessible documents, whether Word, Google, or PDF**. Some key concepts to apply in creating accessible documents include the following:

- Use headings
- Use strong color contrasts and avoid pattern backgrounds
- Text should be at least 12 point and font should be clear and easy to read, with a good amount of white space
- Use lists that are bulleted or numbered
- Add alternate text to images that describe the image and its purpose
- If tables are necessary, make sure column and row headings are included and informative

The [Center for Digital Accessibility and User Experience](#) is a great resource for learning more about and applying accessibility practices, and offers [specific guides for a variety of accessible content](#). You can find specific how-to instructions for common document formats for the following products:

- [Creating accessible Word documents](#). If visual learning is more your style, [training videos on how to make Word Accessible](#) are also available
- [Creating accessible Power Points](#)
- [Creating accessible PDFs](#)

5. Establish participation rules for a virtual meeting. Apply some of the same practices done internally by passing on the following tips to participants prior to any virtual meeting:

- Circulate content prior to meeting
- Mute when joining the meeting
- Use of chat function for question or notifying of comments
- Allow for more and longer pauses between speakers
- Identify self when speaking if not called on