MUSINC Online Working Guidelines
(with particular regard to accessibility)

Musinc have developed these guidelines due to the increased online working environment that we all find ourselves in due to COVID-19.

Although we all hope that we will not be in this position long term, it must be acknowledged that we will probably all take forward some elements of online working into our post COVID futures.

Musinc are committed to the ongoing process of developing our knowledge, understanding and application of inclusive practice, and therefore felt it would be useful to compile some notes for any online work that we may be delivering, in order to ensure that inclusion remains at the forefront of our thoughts when delivering online work.

Some of the information within this guidance has been taken from other sources including:

https://www.littlecog.co.uk/accessible-meetings.html

https://www.drakemusic.org/blog/becky-morris-knight/accessibility-in-video-conferencing-and-remote-meetings/

http://luxicreative.co.uk/when-you-just-cant-zoom/

We understand that everyone feels differently about online working. Some people may find the process of attending a meeting/activity online difficult for accessibility reasons, or there may be other reasons e.g. screen fatigue/technology issues that are barriers for them engaging in the online activity/session. Here are some considerations you can make when planning and delivering your online work:

Planning online work

- Plan online activity well ahead, so that time can be taken to book in accessible services.
- Budget for accessibility in your planning.
- Consider which platform you are going to use. Here are some questions to guide your thinking:
    o How many people will be taking part?
    o Is it a public session or a closed session? (consider confidentiality or sensitive nature of content for public facing platforms)
    o How easy is the platform for those who may not be familiar with using technology?
- Plan online sessions to be more interactive than you may have done for a face to face session. This will be better for keeping your audience engaged.
- Think of creative ways to engage your audiences – break out rooms/chat function/set tasks that involve everyone contributing to the session.

- Schedule comfort breaks as you would with face to face, and perhaps more often as screens are more tiring then people.
- Consider the duration of the session/meeting. People find it difficult to focus online for longer sessions. Consider 40, 60 or 90 minutes maximum as a guidance.
- Have an idea of what's going to happen beforehand and send it out to attendees. Ask those who can't attend if they'd like to contribute. Make that contribution and name known, with their permission.
- Don't stop inviting people to meetings/sessions because they haven't attended previously. There may be reasons you are unaware of that are preventing them attending. Make an effort to find out (sensitively) what the reasons are and if there are ways to support them.
- Consider recording content of sessions for people to watch in their own time and their own way i.e. in shorter bursts if they cannot attend live.
- If recording sessions, let those in the session know that it is being recorded and that it will be sent to those who were invited to the meeting but who couldn't attend.
- Offer to send meeting/session content afterwards to those who couldn't attend, in a variety of formats e.g. text transcript, recording.

No internet?

Offer an option for people to join the session via phone. This is possible in a number of platforms. It will allow people to join in the conversation, but think through how you will try to offer as full participation as possible, without the visual element.

Promotional material

If you are planning to create promotional material for your session, consider the following:

- Large print
- Easy Read - keep documents short and include context and explanations of concepts. Easy read documents should have a jargon buster at the end which explains specific terms which might not be in every day use.
- BSL video
- Audio descriptions of images and/or videos
- Use simple fonts and colour contrasts (as outlined in the accessibility section below)

Before the session

- Do a test for the technology. Ask someone inexperienced to follow your instructions and see if they are fool proof.
- Consider your background (minimal, not revealing personal info etc)

- Make sure your content is more thoroughly thought out – working online leaves less room for spontaneity
- Make sure devices are fully charged, or plugged in.
- Make sure you have all materials with you ready, and water
- Ask other guests and/or presenters to 'arrive' at the session early to go through session protocol (see etiquette section)
- Provide as much information as possible regarding what the session will involve and what will be expected from participants prior to the session start.
- If you are incorporating accessibility features into your session, make these clear to potential participants from the outset. Produce an accessibility statement along with your promotion and communications to attendees.

Online etiquette and general considerations (don't forget your manners!)

Be aware that some people may find online working very difficult for a variety of reasons. Here are some general things to consider:

- Some people may not feel and behave the same when online. We haven't got the intricacy of facial expressions, tactility, sideline jokes and jovial behavior that we have in face to face interactions. Be considerate that people may feel a lot more self-conscious and less engaged than they would in person.
- Some may find the process of attending an online meeting/session more complicated than others. For example, if we break down the process into all of the small steps we get:
    o Finding a safe, quiet, appropriate space with a plug socket nearby and a chair and desk/table. (People may feel uncomfortable showing the interior of their personal space)
    o Having the appropriate technology (smartphone/laptop/tablet)
    o Checking that the device is charged/plugged in and is in working order (i.e. does the camera/mic work?)
    o Checking that nobody else in the household is needing to use the device at the same time.
    o Checking the wifi is switched on and working (some people may not have wifi, or there may be others in the household that are using internet at the same time)
    o Checking that the online platform that is being used is installed and working correctly and if not, trying to follow the instructions to get it working before the session starts (are the instructions for installing the platform easy to follow for those who are not technically minded? People may feel inadequate asking for help)
    o Finding the appropriate log in instructions and following them (were they sent in an email/meeting invitation, and when were they sent? People may not want to ask to be sent them again for fear of annoying someone)

- o Being anxious that you can't follow the session due to inadequate accessibility (more about accessibility in section below)
- Be fully focused, remove distractions so that you are listening and taking things in as you would in a room
- Slow down your speech, and leave space in between your sentences for people to digest it. Ensure you articulate as clearly as possible. Your voice is your most prominent tool online and therefore more time is needed for the sound to be absorbed by listeners. N.B remember that there may be some people in sessions for which English is not their first language. Don't be afraid of a bit if silence!
- Be aware that some people may not feel comfortable with using the video and microphone so make it clear that they can still access the session in whichever way they want.
- Make it clear that people can leave or take a break whenever they need to.
- Avoid using jargon and/or acronyms (or explain them first!)
- Consider your body language (open, friendly)
- Maintain eye contact as much as possible
- Breathe! It makes everyone feel calmer
- For Q & A sessions: make sure everyone watching/listening can hear the questions. Either use a microphone or repeat questions for the rest of the group.
- Avoid unconscious bias and making assumptions about the others in the room

At the start of your session

- Let people know what to expect from the meeting – how it will be scheduled and managed and remind attendees of any relevant etiquette considerations.
- Make sure you have active chairing. This is where people indicate they'd like to speak and wait to be brought in by name by the Chair. It's important to continue to say peoples' names throughout to help orientate the meeting for various users
- **Introduce the access features of your meeting at the beginning of the meeting** – e.g. inform deaf participants that they can 'pin' the interpreters on zoom to ensure they remain onscreen, explain how to get captions if people can't see them and mention access keyboard shortcuts.
- Let people know when the breaks will be.
- If the meeting has small numbers of attendees, ask them to describe themselves for any visually impaired attendees.
- Let people know that they can leave their cameras off if they would prefer to and inform participants that they do not have to speak if they would prefer to offer written comments through chat or feedback by email afterwards.

After the session

- Ensure that all meeting notes and follow up feedback forms are relevant and created in accessible formats – use summaries of key points rather than direct word for word translations to BSL and Easy Read software.

- If you are sharing your meeting online as a recording, ensure the access features are maintained e.g. captions and visible BSL interpreters.
- **Ask people for feedback** on access as we are learning all of the time – both in terms of what is working for people and also how to adapt and adjust to better suit access.

Screen fatigue

It is well documented that working in front of a screen can have detrimental health implications long term, including:

- Virtigo/nausea/sickness
- Headaches
- Migraines

Keep each item short and clear, keep presentations tight on time, and keep the meeting flowing. It is possible to join zoom meetings without using the screen view if this is an access issue – simply pull up another screen from your computer to cover it and use shortcuts for hands up, voting and chat.

Accessibility

- Consider the needs of those who identify as neuro diverse
- Ask people for their accessibility requirements well in advance of sessions so that you can plan what is needed.
- Publish accessibility statement regarding the session outlining the accessibility considerations that have been put in place.
- Introduce the features at the beginning of the session

Here are some possible access features that you can plan into your session:

Captions/subtitles

- To have live captions on screen you will need a person to create them during the session. This could be an expert speed typist from within your organization for informal meetings, but for formal and public meetings it is advisable to book a third party captioning service.
- The captioner will need to be made a panelist and you will need to give permissions through your meeting software (eg zoom) for them to connect. They will usually arrive fifteen minutes early to get set up. Allow time for this and make sure they have a named contact person to connect with on the day.

- It is essential to provide them with an agenda, names of those attending and any notes, scripts or presentations in advance so that they have a sense of what the meeting is about and to make their own preparations.
- Booking a professional experienced captioner well in advance is recommended.
- Make sure you set budget aside for live closed captioning services.
- Caption information for the various video conferencing platforms can be found here (this information is taken from a blog by Becky Morris Knight for Drake Music.
    - **Skype** – Automatic captions, not always 100% accurate, but helpful. Multi-videos can crash more. Caption info for Skype here.
    - **Zoom** – Captions can be enabled, but someone has to be assigned to type them. Caption info for Zoom here.
    - **Google Hangouts** – Automatic captions/subtitles, we haven't tested these yet. Caption info for Google Hangouts here.
    - **Gotomeeting/ Gotowebinar** – Offers transcriptions after the meeting, but possibly not live. Caption info for Gotomeeting here.
    - **Teams** – Microsoft's service offers automatic captions/subtitles. We haven't tested it yet. Caption info for Teams here.

    Please note Automatic captions may work reasonably well for smaller conversations and one-to-one discussions, but that for training, livestreaming or bigger group meetings it is not always the best option.

    Professional captioning service 'My Clear Text' say: *"We have tested the automatic captioning on each platform and our advice would be that for informal chats it can be useful, but not for work related content. It's just not accurate enough, or laid out well enough to enhance a meeting, it's more likely to distract."*
- Some links to third party captioning services are:
    - My clear text www.mycleartext.com
    - Ai-Media: https://www.ai-media.tv/products/live-content/zoom-meeting-live-captions/
    - 121 captions: https://www.121captions.com/

BSL

- It is essential to provide interpreters with an agenda, names of those attending and any notes, scripts or presentations in advance so that they have a sense of what the meeting is about and to make their own preparations.
- Booking a trained and qualified interpreter is essential, and well in advance is recommended.
- If you are planning to share a recording later you must get the interpreters permission for this, and you will need to ensure your recorded version has the interpreter visible at all times.
- If there is a single BSL interpreter / user check in advance how often they will need breaks and for what duration. Where two interpreters are present they will arrange their swap-over time but don't forget about breaks for BSL users as it is intense on and offline.

- Explain that users can 'pin' the interpreter on Zoom so they remain seen

Audio descriptions

- It has become good practice for every person speaking to do an **audio described introduction** which is a short factual description of themselves. For example, "I am a tall white woman in her fifties with teal hair and a scarf to match. I am wearing a black top and glasses". When introducing this feature to panelists and participants it's important to stress that it's a factual exercise and not an opportunity for self-deprecation or to be overlong or witty**.**
- **Images, slides and videos need to have the visual content described**. Keep this short and factual again, but if it is about a piece of art, something about the atmosphere the piece creates.
- Do not put text in images. Text needs to be added underneath an image for those with screen readers to be able to understand it.
- For videos, ideally it is best practice to have an audio described version available. If you don't have an AD version then give a brief description of any visual elements which aren't explained by the audio.

Presentations

- If you are using slides, read out the content of each slide, and describe images. This often makes us realise there is too much text on the slide, so as a starting point use keywords or a phrase rather than long blocks of text.

Text and fonts

- Use large fonts (at least 24) and simple, sans serif, fonts (e.g. Arial, Verdana, Helvetica)

Colours

- Use colour contrast for documents and slides. E.g. using a cream coloured background with dark text will help those with dyslexia

Documents and screen sharing

- Documents which are more than 10 pages long need a contents page with hyperlinks to the relevant sections of the document.
- The reading order of any text or document should be clear, logical and easy to follow and the use of footnotes should be avoided.
- Screen sharing and live annotation will need careful description as this will present significant access barriers to Visually Impaired People (VIPs).
- If you are sharing a website it might be a good idea to give the link in the chat so that people can access it themselves to follow along with your description.

- If you are sharing a document ensure that any VIPs have the document before the conversation (if possible) to allow their screen reading software to go through it.

Keyboard shortcuts

- **There are access keyboard shortcuts** on zoom for visually impaired people which are also really useful for people who experience sensory overload or have screen fatigue. Don't assume that people already know about them – you will need to share them or make reference to them at appropriate times. For example if you want to use the chat function it is alt plus 'h' on a pc. The software host will have an accessibility page.

Chat function

- It has become common practice to invite people to say hello on 'chat' functions at the beginning of meetings – this is completely inaccessible to people with dyslexia, learning disabled people, visually impaired people, some neurodivergent people and to those with screen fatigue. It is almost impossible to keep up with the speed of it and can create great confusion. Of course you could have it arranged so that the messages come to the host or a panelist with the responsibility to read them out for everyone but it is worth considering how valuable this is.
- Chat is often misused in meetings with lots of members, with separate meetings taking place on chat so the thread of the actual meeting is lost and leads to lots of confusion. You do need to take a decision about how chat is going to be used and if it is to be used appoint someone to monitor the chat to read out contributions and questions at intervals.

These online accessibility guidelines were created in August 2020 and will be continuously reviewed and updated as we continue on our online inclusion journey.