Accessibility in Virtual Programming

Video transcript

- [Althea] Welcome today. We're so glad that you could join us for our program on Accessibility in Virtual Programming. We're co-hosted today by the Rutgers School of Social Work Hub for Aging Collaboration, the Rutgers Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, the Inclusive Healthy Communities Grant Program, and Age-Friendly North Jersey.

I realized I made the first mistake of the afternoon by not saying my name before I started speaking. My name is Althea Pestine-Stevens, and I'm with Rutgers School of Social Work Hub for Aging Collaboration as well as Age-Friendly North Jersey. Before we get started with the rest of the programming this afternoon, I want to go over a few notes of housekeeping.

First of all...and I will have instructions with screenshots available on the subsequent slides for many of these items on here right now. You also should have received a copy of these slides in an email that I sent out yesterday. So, closed captioning is available. We also have two American Sign Language interpreters with us here today.

You don't need to worry about pinning them because they should be spotlighted for you as well today. We encourage participation throughout the meeting. We will have some audience polls. Please also use the chat to ask questions and add comments throughout.

My co-facilitator, Rebecca Martin, will be monitoring the chat, and please do chime in if there's something that needs to be addressed right away. We will also have designated time to ask questions orally. We ask when you're not speaking to please keep yourself muted, and that when you are speaking, please turn on your video if you can.

This is especially helpful for folks who read lips, so that they can understand what you're saying better. Please also let us know if something is not accessible by messaging Rebecca Martin in the chat. They should be showing up as a co-host early on the list of participants to be able to chat with. So, if you need to enable to show the captions if they're not already being shown for you, you want to click on this button here that says CC.

You may need to click on the three dots that says More in order to get the menu for captions. So then when you click on this caret here next to the CC Show Captions button, it'll bring up a menu, and you can choose whether to show captions, to show the full transcript, or disable captions.

You can pick your options there. To turn on your audio and video, the microphone button here on the left side of the bottom of the screen, you click there to mute or unmute. You'll also click the caret there to bring up the menu of options for audio. Similarly, for the button next to it, to the right of it, to start or turn off your video.

And also, there's a caret for the menu of options there as well. I'm just going to quickly check the chat and make sure that there isn't any issue urgently before I move on to the next slide.

Great. Yes, we are using auto-captions today from Zoom. We don't have a person doing captions for us, but we do have people doing ASL interpreting. Pinning a participant, we shouldn't need to do this because we should be spotlighting the people who are important to be able to see right now. But if you need to, you click on the top three dots of their video of their Zoom box, and you can say Pin Video or Unpin Video depending on what you need.

So, moving along to the fun parts of this meeting, are there any other issues of housekeeping that we need to address before doing that? Rebecca, are we good?

- [Rebecca] I think we're good.

- Wonderful. Thank you. So, we're going to start with some welcome and introductions, and then we're going to have a panel conversation with our three panelists, followed by an open Q&A interspersed with some poll questions and some chat questions, and a reflection from two of our grad students at the Rutgers School of Social Work, and we'll conclude with a thanks for everyone who participated.

So to start off and set some expectations for this meeting today, the goal of this meeting is to learn why accessibility is important in virtual events and also some ways that we can work towards making our events more inclusive. We are not going to be giving...you know, we don't have an all-encompassing comprehensive list of all of the resources that are available, but we hope that you're able to learn about some things that...and not just learn about some

tools that are helpful, but learn about ways that you can be thinking about and approaching issues of accessibility and inclusion in your online programming.

Rebecca, would you please launch our first poll?

- Sure.

- That we can start to get to know who's here today. I'm going to read through the poll questions while everybody's taking them because I've heard that it's not always great with screen readers...not screen readers, for people who need to enlarge the font. It could be very small. So I'm going to go ahead and read the questions out for those people who that might help. Question 1, which of the following describes you today?

Select all that apply. Advocate, self-advocate, older adult, student, service provider, researcher, community leader, other. And for other, you want to describe the question below. So, question number 2 is if you want to write in an other, to specify that.

Question 3. How familiar would you say you are with issues of accessibility and inclusion in the virtual environment? This one, we're asking you to select one choice. Not very, I'm learning about it for the first time today. Somewhat, I've learned about it before, but haven't implemented.

Proficient, I've implemented and have more to learn. And very familiar, I have taught others or advocated. Question 4.

- [Woman 1] It disappeared.

- The poll disappeared, I guess.

- The poll disappeared.

- The poll disappeared.

- That's what I'm seeing. Can I relaunch it? It's not going to wipe it out?

- If you relaunch it...

- [crosstalk].

- ...we'll get new information. They should both be coded, but they won't be compiled together. But, yeah, you can relaunch it.

- Okay.

- [Julia] I think maybe it disappeared before everyone got a chance to finish answering the first one. Yeah, okay.

- Yeah, sorry about that.

- [Miss Ruth] Althea?

- Mm-hmm?

- [crosstalk] if I may. I'm wondering if it's because as a co-host, I exited the poll. Could it be the co-host exiting the poll means the poll's over?

- I think that might...

- It could be. Perhaps. Yeah, you may have accidentally ended the poll. So, don't press End Poll. If that's an option for you on the screen.

- Don't do that.

- It's all right. No worries.

- I'll just [crosstalk].

- We'll be able to compile them together later.

- Okay. Sorry about that.

- Number 4, is there a particular disability community for which you're interested in improving programs? Select all that apply. Hearing loss, mobility, neurodiversity, speech, vision loss, and, again, other. Number five is if you selected other, please specify. And that's the end of this poll. If you did respond the first time and you don't mind going ahead and responding again the second time so that we can see the responses for everybody altogether, that would be great.

- Also, Althea, do you just keep scrolling down to get to the 2, 3, 4? Okay. I think people submitted after one, and it disappeared.

- Oh, yeah. So, you can go through, scroll down, and make sure you get to...the fifth question is the last question on there. Give another 30 seconds or so. Is that okay for folks?

- [Jackie] No, I think you need to resend it for those of us who submitted because it said submit right after one.

- Yes, and now we can't get back to the [crosstalk].

- We can't get back, so. A number of us.

- Thank you, Jackie. It's okay. It'll still record in our final composite. We'll just show what we have here for now for the next [crosstalk].

- But we can't get to anything. It just says Welcome and Introductions and...

- Thank you. Yeah, we'll just have to sit tight and wait for others to finish it. I'll go ahead and close the poll now. Give 10 more seconds to finish clicking if anybody's still working on it. This will also help our panelists be able to get a better sense of what types of things would be more helpful to focus on.

So, it looks like we have a lot of advocates, a lot of service providers here today. Oh, you won't be able to see the others on there right now, but we'll be able to compile that. Thank you for sharing. And we have a variety of different levels of... Oh, I have to press Share Results.

We have a variety... Thank you for your patience. Variety of different experience of places with issues of accessibility and inclusion, but it seems like many are in that somewhat category, where they're still learning and learning how to implement. And a lot of other across-the-board interest in the different types of disability communities that we listed.

So, thank you. Thank you for sharing, and we are glad for your participation. So, I wanted to give a couple of words from our host organizations because I know that a lot of you are coming from various different outreach networks, the way that you found out about this meeting today.

So, the Rutgers Hub for Aging Collaboration is one of the sponsors, one of the hosts at the School of Social Work, and we advance excellence in collaborative research, teaching, and engagement to improve social context for healthy and equitable aging. The Hub serves as a nexus to strengthen networks among community leaders, researchers, service providers, policymakers, and others toward innovation and leadership for aging in community.

Fueled by the social work value of leveraging social relationships for change, we work across disciplines and sectors to improve environments for aging among individuals, families, and communities and all of their diversity. Rebecca, would you like to share about the two organizations you're representing?

- Yes, thank you. This is Rebecca Martin. This event is co-sponsored by the Inclusive Healthy Communities Grant Program, funded by the New Jersey

Division of Disability Services, and administered by a team from the Rutgers Edward J.

Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy. The Inclusive Healthy Communities Grant Program is approaching its third cycle and thus far has funded 30 projects throughout New Jersey that are focused on increasing inclusivity for people with disabilities. Funded projects focus on creating sustainable policy systems and environmental changes and have been undertaken by municipalities, county offices, healthcare organizations, and non-profit organizations.

These non-profit organizations hail from a rich variety of fields, including disability services and healthcare access, as well as other areas of wellbeing, such as environmental access, college preparation, and workforce development, safety and the creative arts. Aligned with the disability rights motto, "Nothing About Us Without Us," the IHC grant-funded projects aim to incorporate people with disabilities as thought leaders, and projects consider intersectional positioning of people with disabilities to better serve individuals throughout our diverse state of New Jersey.

As with all events sponsored in part by the IHC Grant Program, we'd like to take a moment to express our deep gratitude to Peri Nearon and her team at the New Jersey Division of Disability Services for making trainings and the grant program possible. Thank you.

- Thank you, Rebecca, and thank you to Peri and the IHC program for their support. Age-Friendly North Jersey is a growing network dedicated to making the communities where you live, work, and play better for longer, healthier, and more equitable lives. Our alliance supports Age-Friendly leaders who are doing the work of strengthening collaborations for meaningful and sustainable community impact.

We are led by local philanthropies and the Rutgers School of Social Work Hub for Aging Collaboration. Our alliance includes leaders from Age-Friendly community initiatives in Bergen, Essex, Morris, Somerset, Passaic, and Union counties in New Jersey. Finally, the Digital Accessibility Working Group, which formed through the New Jersey Age-Friendly Virtual Fair, which was an event hosted by Age-Friendly North Jersey and other partner organizations last September.

So this group was formed based on advocates reaching out to make sure that they could feel included and that they could access the fair. And the

conversation kept going. So, this event was developed collaboratively with this group, and bringing in also our colleagues from the Inclusive Healthy Communities team. And now, it's my honor to be able to introduce our panelists.

We have Arlene Romoff, who is an author and advocate for the hearing loss community. Kris McElroy, artist, author, athlete, volunteer, educator, and advocate for multiple disabilities, including mobility and neurodiversity, speech impairment, and mental health.

And Miss Ruth, who is a consultant and advocate for the low-vision community. Welcome. And I will stop sharing my screen so that the panelists are on the screen instead.

- Althea, I'm sorry to interrupt. It's Julia. Just for one quick second. I think someone was having difficulty reading lips because, you know, when you look at the screen, our names are right under our faces, and they were blocking off the lips of the person. So, I don't know if it's possible for people to adjust their cameras, but...

- Was it me?

- No.

- Was it a certain person?

- It was maybe Rebecca at that point, but now Rebecca's up in the center of the frame, but other people may have this same similar problem.

- Okay. So, thank you for letting us know. I will try to make sure that I am up closer to the camera and in the center. Thank you. Great. So, I am very, very thrilled to welcome our three panelists up to the screen. So, I'd like to start out.

If each of you could take about two minutes to tell us a little bit about your background and the disability community or communities that you're passionate for advocating about. Let's start with Arlene.

- [Arlene] Hello, everybody. I know some of the people in this room, and I'm really privileged to be here. Arlene Romoff. I am deaf, and I use cochlear implants to hear. As you see, I have headphones on. Those headphones are actually covering the microphones of my cochlear implants.

I was born with normal hearing, and as a young adult, I started losing my hearing gradually. So, for the next 25 years, I went from normal hearing to deaf. Along that path, there were no such thing as cochlear implants, but fortunately, by the end of 25 years, there were.

And so, at that point in time, I got my first cochlear implant. And I've had my cochlear implants for 25 years. So if you do the math, that's 50 years of hearing loss experience. All along the way, I would ask myself, "Why me?" And the answer was always, "Why not?"

And so, I was determined that if this was going to happen to me, then something good should come of it. So, at that point, I was able to get involved first with the League for the Hard of Hearing, which is now the Center for Hearing Communication, and then HLAA, the Hearing Loss Association of America. So here in New Jersey in the 1990s, we set up a state association as part of HLAA.

And with that, we also made the Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Advisory Council include people who were hard of hearing, not culturally deaf and use sign language. So, I am not a sign language user, but because of my networking and working collaboratively with everybody with hearing loss, I'm familiar with everybody in the state.

We have done some amazing things as far as advocacy. One is getting captioning in live theater and addressing accessibility needs. And you'll hear more as we talk later, but I just wanted to leave you with something that was my mantra, and that is that always it seemed that somebody should do something.

And though somebody should add it up, and if you look in the mirror, that somebody is you. So, hold that thought, and we'll come back to it.

- Thank you. Kris, would you like to go next?

- [Kris] Yes. This is Kris McElroy speaking. Thank you for having me. I'm very happy to be here. I identify as a biracial Black autistic trans male with multiple disabilities. My disabilities include being autistic.

I also have a progressive neuromuscular condition. It has gone back and forth from cerebral palsy to spinocerebellar ataxia to complex hereditary spastic paraplegia. They have not confirmed which one, and depending on which neurologist I go to and what time of year, it will depend on which one they go with at that time.

It affects my speech, it affects my mobility, it affects everything about my body. I also have several mental health conditions as well. Within all of that, it makes me passionate about advocating for all of those communities that I'm a part of, the neurodiversity community, mental health community, physical disability community, and developmental disability community.

I'm also passionate about intersectionality because it's a part of all of us. We all have multiple identities that we interact with daily and that are a part of us. A little bit more about my background is I'm a dad of a active 2-year-old.

I have a bachelor's in psychology, a master's in human services, and I have done speaking engagements all over the United States. And I am also a trained peer facilitator and have done a variety of work for nonprofits all over the state of Maryland and virtually as well.

Thank you.

- Thank you. Thank you, Kris. And Kris also gave a very detailed talk at a recent Inclusive Healthy Communities program, if we want to put the recording for that in the chat if you're interested in learning more about his story. And all of the contact information for our panelists are included in the slides on the last page of the slides that were emailed out as well.

And, Miss Ruth, would you like to share some about your background?

- Oh, well, thank you. Hi, all. My name is Miss Ruth, and I'm a vision loss community advocate. I'm a member of the American Council of the Blind, the National Federation of the Blind, and my home base is the Low Vision Support Group of Somerset. I've got progressive MS, Sjogren's syndrome, and Asperger's.

I'm also blind in my right eye and have low vision, with floaters, and Roman blind patch in my left. The reason my right eye is blind is that I woke up one day at 36 years old with a large black hole in the vision in my right eye.

And it turns out I had developed a macular hole. So, I had a surgery called vitrectomy to correct it, but instead of making my vision clearer, it left me blind in that eye. So, I was depressed for a long time. I had no form of moral support until I started getting home visits from a social worker from Jewish Family Service, Sharon Chester.

I invited her here today. I don't know if she's here, but she is my angel. And she told me about the Low Vision Support Group of Somerset, led by Larissa

Steinberg and Elsa Zavoda. They made me feel home right away. And over time, I realized that speaking up for myself is also speaking up for others.

And before I knew it, I was a community advocate. And it's important to know that vision loss is a gradation and that there's not only varying degrees of blindness, but visual acuity can transition over time, even on the same day. For me, my vision is fuzzier in the morning, so I always prefer afternoon meetings if it's possible.

That's accessibility for me as well. I'm what's called a high partial, or someone who has enough vision not to have to rely fully on a screen reader. But I do use Microsoft [inaudible] to read documents. When I get close to the screen, I can see well enough using a large font, contrasting colors, and a huge monitor.

It's off to the side here. It's like the size of a huge TV. So, accessibility is a big issue for people who are blind or have low vision, and I'm so glad to participate on this panel. Thank you.

- Thank you. Now, I'd like to hear about a time that you felt like you were really included. This could be an example of in an in-person or a virtual program. But what does it mean to really feel included? Not just that you can come, but that you're really included in a program or event.

We'll go on the opposite order this time. Miss Ruth, would you like to start?

- Yes, please. It's not a digital experience as such, but a few years ago, I was on the Patient Family Advocacy Committee for VNA, Visiting Nurse Association. After I sent an email praising my visiting nurse and making a suggestion about their process, they sent an Uber to pick me up from Somerset to take me to Holmdel to their office.

They met me at the door, they treated me like royalty. It's like, "What's happening here? What's the angle?" They even ordered me lunch, and we all had salads. And at one point, I picked up the tiny cup with dressing and I dipped my lettuce in it, and I dipped it again.

I said, "Uh-oh, is this everybody's dressing, this tiny cup? I'm so sorry." They told me the kindest lie I ever heard. "Oh, it's no problem. We eat salad without dressing all the time." It's like, "Really?" Salad without dressing tastes like a bowl of weeds. You might as well eat the leaves in the yard. But they were so kind.

It was the first time patient experience got onto my radar, and they just embodied this sense of, "You're the one with the answers. We are going out of our way to bring you in and make you feel at home so you will feel comfortable enough to share your experience.

- Thank you. Thank you for sharing. And, Kris.

- So, mine would be in-person. Most of my experiences have been where I am either in public spaces physically where it's assumed that I'm not able to contribute, I'm not able to participate, that I'm not a dad, or that my wife is my caregiver and we're not married at all.

Oftentimes, I have to fight through the assumptions before I even get a chance to share what my name is. So, this experience was when I was going to tour a preschool for my daughter.

The assistant director asked if I could meet with her and take a personal tour so that we could talk about my daughter's needs. I prepared for it.

I expected to, one, be asked, who are you? What are you doing here? And be assumed that I don't have a child. And that was not the case at all. I thought I would be treated as a disabled person or a disabled parent. That also was not the case.

The way I was interacted with blew me away because I was actually treated as a parent first and a parent only. My disabilities were not a topic of conversation because the environment and the way that the tour occurred, it wasn't these extra pieces, it was just, there were automatic ramps, and we just went that way.

It was an elevator, and it wasn't talked about as an accommodation, but just, "We're touring the school, let's take the elevator." I really enjoyed being interacted with as a parent first because it's not something that I actually ever get to experience, and that was the first place since becoming a parent I got to experience being a parent first.

And that felt truly inclusive to me.

- Thank you for sharing. And, Arlene.

- Sure. I had to pick and choose an experience to tell you about. My first thought was to tell you what it was like to attend the very first open caption performance on Broadway, but that would only take a sentence. So, there was another experience that happened to me right before the pandemic. I was

attending a disability advocacy conference in Washington, D.C., in the Rayburn Building.

And I had requested captioning, and this is in-person, so they provided me with a captioner. I did not even bother thinking about an assistive listening system. I didn't want to deal with receivers and equipment.

I was just fine. Just leave me alone, I like to just come in and function. Well, the curiosity got the better of me because the captioning was great, and I had seen a sign outside the room that had an ear logo, but it didn't have a T. I was looking to see if there was an induction loop in that room, and if there was, would you be able to turn on the T-coil in my cochlear implants and get the sound directly from the microphones.

I said, "Well, what are the odds of that?" But I was kind of curious. Don't ask me why I did this. I turned my cochlear implants to the T-coil program, and lo and behold, the sound from all the microphones of the panelists came straight into my head. I was blown away because the sound coming from a microphone to that loop where the room was looped, and the T-coil was picking up that electronic signal, and it didn't turn it back into sound because I have no ears, it went straight to my brain, and I heard it like nothing else.

It was like, we want more of that. Well, it was obvious that the people who ran this convention conference weren't really aware that this room was looped. So, being an advocate, I raised my hand, and, you know, there were some senators in the room. Oh, big deal.

And I stopped the meeting, and I said, "This room is looped." And I had to explain what that meant. And they realized why I stopped the meeting, because it was that newsworthy. And I told them that made me feel really invisible. Like, I didn't want to stand out as being the person needing to sit in front of the captions or with pink headphones on with receivers or electronics.

I just wanted to be there and function, and that's what this induction loop made me do. I went in there as if I had a ramp, like those people in their wheelchairs, sat down, turned it on, heard. Gold, nothing like that. So, you heard it here.

Remember that word, induction and loop. Induction loop. Save that thought.

- Thank you, all, for sharing. I'm hearing a lot about kind of the changing norms when you feel like you're not someone who has to stand out and advocate on top for yourself to be able to participate in something when it's there, and

when you can participate and feel like you're a regular attendee. Like, that's just...

I really appreciate all of you sharing these stories and also not just thinking about, you know, once you're already in the event, but how are you getting there? You know, the fact that we're attuned to how people are able to access not just the event itself, but during, before, and after and everything. So, thank you.

My next question has already kind of come in the chat a little bit. Some of you have alluded to these already. So, we've learned a lot together about the tools that are available for accessibility and inclusion in the virtual environment. So, what are some tools that you'd like to share with us? They can be tools that you use yourselves or that you're aware of that others could use to increase access to virtual programming, like this Zoom event, for example.

And let's switch it up. Kris, would you like to go first?

- Yes. Yes, I can. So, I work with a toolbox. Having multiple disabilities, my needs, they shift at times, and sometimes I need to be able to use multiple things at the same time. So, my toolbox of things that I use are headphones that actually amplify the sound for me, especially if I'm having trouble hearing, so that I can turn it down on my left side and turn it up on my right side.

I also at times use noise-canceling headphones if the sound is overloading for me at certain times. So, it depends on my needs in that area. So, I use both of those tools. I also use the closed captioning and live transcript if offered.

A big one for me is also being able to access materials ahead of time. This experience was excellent with that. Many are not that I attend, but it really does help me know how to prepare as well.

My body gets really stiff when sitting for virtual programming, so I actually use a step stool to have my feet up.

I have to have a setup where my body can comfortably sit without going into an autonomic crisis because of how my body's positioned and for the length of time. Also, using my preferred name and pronouns helps the space be accessible to me because it allows me to feel like I can show up as my authentic self.

Being able to plug in my Prolobe to go and Speechify app, which helps on days when my voice, the muscles are either very spastic or I'm having trouble with clear speech. Being able to plug it in and have it speak for me really helps.

The only barrier to that is sometimes it doesn't translate to the virtual platform, depending on which one is being used. Zoom, I will say, is one of the most accessible ones for using those two tools.

And then I also have fidgets that I use as well during meetings, which increase my access by helping my anxiety and my focus. And then I also prepare what I'm going to say ahead of time because that helps with my participation.

And being able to hear what other people are using as well and being able to try that out has been huge because tools that I have found that are helpful, most times I have found those out through other people.

So I find that extremely beneficial for using and finding tools to increase my access in virtual spaces.

- Thank you. I had said at the beginning, we're not going to promise a comprehensive list of anything, but I think you're trying to prove me wrong.

I really do appreciate your directing us towards the attention to, you know, even though we're saying we're in a virtual environment, there are things in our own physical environments that can make it so that we can access the virtual content even better. So, thank you for sharing that orientation as well. And I've got my fidget right here going, so I can definitely appreciate that very, very much.

So, thank you. Arlene, would you like to go next? Oh, you're muted. You press it twice, I think.

- There we go. Well, for me, it always comes down to, how are you going to deliver the sound, and how are you going to deliver the captions? So, the virtual environment makes that very much easier than your in-person live environment because the captioning has to have a human being in the room, and your assistive listening system if you have one, and sometimes you only get a choice of one or the other.

So, virtual allows me to have captioning and address the sound very easily. Now, I showed you I have headphones here. That's my choice. I could take them off and just walk around, but I could actually link to my computer's

Bluetooth. In other words, put on Bluetooth, and anything in the computer's sound would go directly to my processors.

I don't prefer that because you have to connect yourself, which gets a little more tricky, you know, and then my phone starts to complain, it's jealous of the computer. So, just in general, I just put headphones on, and that's fine. But why should I wear headphones if the speaker's 10 inches away from me? Ten inches, for me, counts.

And if the sound is further away, even 10 inches, 12 inches, then it is requiring my brain to work harder. And so, the whole process here is to have my brain work on the content of the meeting I'm at. So, that's the sound portion.

The captioning portion, these captions are automated captioning, and then there are captions that can be provided by a live court reporter. There are pros and cons of each, so I won't go into the details of that, but the bottom line is that there is captioning provided, and that's essential always.

Whether it's turning on and it's a bot, or you turn it on, it's a human. And so, we could do another panel presentation on that in itself.

- Thank you. And, yeah, I really appreciate just, you know, now that we've all learned how to move programming into the virtual environment, realizing how much more inclusive the virtual environment can be, and to not lose sight of that as things are more and more moving to be in-person. And another thing that we've spoken about in the past is how hybrid events are definitely something for a topic for a whole other panel or a whole other, you know, year-long set of panels, I think, that we could go into to working on best practices for inclusion in those.

Thank you. Miss Ruth.

- Yes. Now, I'm looking at my answers, not as comprehensive as you's guys, but I would say really important for the vision loss community would be if something's on the screen, a PowerPoint presentation, please read it in its entirety. Please don't just sum it up, thumbnail it. I want to hear everything people can see.

Also, if there's things in the chat, comments in the chat, please read them out. In this case, I think it's just people saying hello or greetings, but I also know I need to...I forgot to turn off notifications for the chat because as someone on the spectrum, it's very distracting to keep seeing it pop up, and I just forgot to turn it off.

I think making people aware that you can turn off the chat notifications, you know, sensory input issues as I do, that's kind of an important thing to share. Also, if you could, remember, and I'm learning this myself, speak slowly in sort of a deliberative cadence because it's easier for the ASL interpreters, who are my heroes.

I think they're wonderful. I don't even need them, but they exhaust themselves so that it's accessible for people who are deaf and hard of hearing. Also, the energy with which you speak. If you come at me in a rush, hectic harried way, even if it's something that's a good project, I don't think I can participate with you.

I think you're coming at it with an energy that's going to defeat me. So, if you can, try to get yourself centered before you con talk to anybody. Just in general, that's good for everybody. So, those are my comments, thank you.

- Thank you. And thank you for sharing about kind of the issues when you have multiple needs for accessibility that are intersecting and ways that we can think about being the most effective during programming with all of those in mind.

So, thank you. We are having some really fantastic questions coming in from the chat that Rebecca is, you know, compiling right now from the chat and from the Q&A in the meeting, too, that Rebecca will be asking. And I do want to make sure we have a chance to get to those. So, if the panelists don't mind me combining questions 4 and 5 for one more kind of round robin and then we can get to the audience Q&A.

Does that sound okay? I will read the questions out. Okay. So, one theme I've come away with from our conversations together is that there are things that might seem like small fixes to organizers that can dramatically increase the way that someone can participate.

So, but there are also kind of long-term needs for kind of more systems change or cultural change in the way that we're thinking about inclusion for virtual programs. And when I said virtual programs before, I said Zoom as the example, but I'm also considering websites and PDFs, and, you know, doc-reading documents, virtual documents and things like that as well.

So, I meant to clarify that you're welcome to respond from those perspectives as well. So now, to reiterate a long question, could you share with us one kind of quicker fix that organizers might be able to implement to make their

programs more inclusive and something that you view as a longer-term need for the change in the way that we do things?

Arlene, would you like to go first? And you're muted.

- Okay. The problem I see, the quick fix is that Zoom has as its default setting no captioning at all, that in order to get captioning enabled, no matter which kind, whether it's automated captioning or enabling it to be used by a real-time captioner or a human, captioning still has to be enabled in Zoom.

The initial settings in Zoom are where the captions are hidden away and they have to be turned on in the initial settings, but that's not enough for Zoom. The host of the session has to enable the captioning for that particular Zoom event. So, I have attended Zoom conferences where it's just the webinar, you have no contact with the human beings that are presenting, and there was no captioning, and there was no way to tell them that.

It was just absurd. Absurd. And so, the quick fix is for the people who are doing their own Zoom events, definitely make sure your captions are enabled in that initial setting, and then for every host, to keep them turned on.

Stay tuned to this thought because there is a longer fix where we don't have to get involved with this insanity. I will have to mention though, as far as being an advocate, and it gets in your blood after doing...

- [crosstalk] I have a reservation that I set up with OpenTable, and we're running a little bit late, and I just wanted to be sure that wasn't going to be a problem.

- Okay, well, we got captioning in the Zoomgov format, which is what the White House uses. They weren't captioning anything. I contacted my congressman, and his office fixed it. So, White House, Zoom is all captioned now.

So, somebody should, somebody did.

- Thank you. In the breakout rooms, too, you might have to contact your Zoom administrator, your account administrator if you're with an organization, to get that switch flicked on. I don't know if they have fixed that since I was last working on this issue. But thank you.

And, Miss Ruth, would you take next?

- Yes, please. So, a quick fix is to acclimate those of us with vision to meeting popularly with speakers whose voices [inaudible] vision loss. Don't know everyone is for people to preference every comment they say with their name, state their name. And so, for example, I will say, "Miss Ruth here," and then make the comment.

I know that takes some getting used to, but it helps when you don't know who speakers are to get used to their voices. And the other question, I think that for a long-term need, I think something that's going to take some creative cajoling is encouraging the practice of using Zoom in vision loss community with video camera on.

It's common practice that nobody turns on the cameras in blindness and low vision groups right now, because we don't need it. We can't really see each other, so. I think, though, if you turn it on, it actually would be helpful for people who are deaf, one. And so, I know there's resistance to the idea, but having got to know Arlene, I know how important it is to her that I turn on my camera.

So, she is a lip reader and will read what I'm saying. And I think it's a long-term goal that nobody I've talked to is ready to do. They all use conference calls in the blindess groups that I participate in. There's only one low-vision group that uses camera. But I think that over time, that will be helpful for everyone.

- Thank you. So sometimes, you know, we find things that work, and we get used to them, and it's a balance of figuring out, do we want to switch to the new technology? What's the balance of the learning curve versus the added benefits and inclusion that it's going to take?

So, these are important things to keep working on. And, Kris.

- For me, one quick fix that I was thinking about is to incorporating more than one way to interact during the virtual programming. Even if you have a website, having more than one way to take in the information. That seems simple and like it's not necessary, but that opens up the access to a lot more people when there's more than one way to participate or take in the information.

And a long-term is...and this is going to take time, and it's started, but it's a long journey, is to change the mindset of accessibility being a singular thing and more of a collective. Because in order for...it's not just one person being able to access the space, it's everyone.

Access for all means it's a collective issue and not a singular. So, that would also change how accommodations are viewed, how programming itself, the process of programming, is viewed and interacted with differently.

- Thank you. Thank you. Definitely, mindset shifts are needed, and realizing that it's not the burden of the person with a disability to be the only one that's working on having a solution, the onus is not just on them, it's on all of us, it's on everybody involved, our whole society.

So, thank you for sharing that. I am going to postpone question 6 on our list for after we do audience Q&A in case there's still any final thoughts that you'd like to share with us if that's all right with the panelists. So now I'd like to invite Rebecca back up. Great.

I think we figured out the issue last time was that Rebecca needed to be spotlighted. So hopefully, the issue with seeing Rebecca's face is okay now, although it may be covered by the captioning. It is on my screen. But go ahead, take us off. If there are specific panelists that the questions might be geared towards, that is great, too. So, Rebecca's going to start with some questions that people typed into the Q&A and into the chat.

You can also raise your hand, and I will go ahead and share my screen to show you instructions for that.

- Okay, thank you very much. This is Rebecca. We had some great questions in both the chat and the Q&A, so we really appreciate that. The first question is, a professional who frequently hosts virtual community workshops would like to know what are some tools that he or she could use to make online environments more accessible to people with disabilities.

If anybody has one, panelists, you may unmute.

- And while you're thinking about that, if there's anything that you feel like hasn't been mentioned in the question that we had about the tools, too, I'm just going to go ahead and read the slide that we have about how to raise your hand.

So, you can ask questions by raising your hand or writing in the chat. Please remember, if you're asking a question, to state your name. And you can also share other resources in the chat. But to raise your hand, there's a Reactions tab at the bottom of the screen, and you can click on that smiley face and press the Raise Hand button to be able to access that. You may have to click on the three dots and the More button in order to bring that menu up.

Take it away, panelists.

- Miss Ruth will comment.

- Pardon?

- Go on, Miss Ruth.

- Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't know about muting stuff. Yeah, at least I have... That's a good question because once I had asked Arlene how do I get ahold of ASL interpreters for my meetings, and she said, "First, find out if you need them." So, her wise suggestion was ask the people who are attending what their needs are.

So, speak to the people who are coming, see what sort of accessibility they need. You'll make assumptions because if I have an ASL interpreter and nobody needs one, or at least if they're getting paid, that's not bad. But I'm saying it seems to me if we have that communication first, when you first send your invitation to a meeting, "Anyone with accessibility needs, please do let me know."

Specifics. What do you need me to provide for you so you feel welcome and it's accessible, too?

- Thank you, Miss Ruth. Did either of the other panelists want to add to that? I will say that, in planning some of these meetings, too, within New Jersey, a lot of the people who prefer to use ASL are known to ASL interpreting agencies. And so, sometimes having the specific person can help them adapt the interpretation to the needs of the particular participants.

Okay. Next up, we have a question about whether there are any virtual platforms that the panelists have found that are not as user-friendly and accessible as others.

- Hi. This is Kris McElroy speaking. One platform I know for me that has been a challenge has been Microsoft Teams and also WebEx. They're supposed to be accessible, but the barriers I have had with them are trouble logging in, trouble sharing how to log in with other participants, and I also have had trouble with getting the captioning to work as well as being able to follow the presentation as well as being able to interact with the activities.

It's not seamless across those settings, so there's a lot of extra pieces to navigate that requires a lot more energy and effort, and that is a barrier for participation for me, at least with my disabilities.

So, it does impact how I'm able to access the spaces on those virtual platforms versus Zoom.

- Thank you, Kris. Miss Ruth, or, Arlene, did you have anything you wanted to add?

- Well, I've mentioned it before, but I will mention it again. The Zoom captioning protocols where everything has to be enabled first is a killer because it's fine with a disability community that knows better, but there are far too many Zoom conferences I've attend, they didn't even know that Zoom had captioning available.

Now, that's absurd. So, my fix is this, how many people are in here? Ninety-one people. We are a committee to change Zoom's hidden caption policy. And I'm serious that this is the place where things begin.

And I said somebody should, and I said, remember. Well, I'm finished with it because, of course, I'm networked, and everybody who is in my shoes, and there are plenty of us, that's a real gripe. You come to a Zoom, and there's no captioning? Never heard of captions?

Now, that's totally absurd. So, Zoom has to change this, and let's make that happen.

- Thank you, Arlene. Miss Ruth.

- Yeah, I also would like to add that I know there's no way to change the font size in certain aspects of Zoom. Like, if I wanted to see what's in the chat, it's really just a small font. I can't increase the size of that. And another issue is because I have low vision and I have my font, my basic default font, so that huge, it throws things out of whack in Zoom.

So, you can only see half of a person's name, or things are overlapping each other because of the way it's set up with a contrasting colors theme and large font. It just doesn't seem that they've looked into Zoom as looked into how users with disabilities use Zoom and what they need.

I mean, it's like this, as Arlene said. I second what she said. But she's got to be the chair. So, that's where good with it.

- So, in that vein, I'm going to launch our Poll number 2, which is just one question because this asks...we're curious about all of you. When you have trouble accessing a Zoom meeting or other online program, how do you

usually resolve the issue? Do you call the help desk provided by your organization or account holder?

Do you try to figure it out yourself and usually resolve it? Do you try to figure it out yourself but usually cannot resolve it? Do you often have trouble but do not know where to go for assistance and still miss out on a portion or all of the program? Or not applicable. And we can go ahead and keep chatting while folks are responding to this one.

There's a good comment in the chat, Rebecca, if you'd like to read that out, from Randy.

- Okay. Randy says, "As a live captioner, I always provide the audience with a link to StreamText for captioning. StreamText is used by the majority of professional nationally certified captioners. It can be synced to Zoom, but the user loses control in Zoom's StreamText. In my experience, has not failed in 20 years and can be placed right under the Zoom screen. You can change fonts, colors, numbers, or lines."

Thank you, Randy. That's great to know. We appreciate that. Yes, when we set up this webinar, actually, we tried to link in an external captioning app. However, a lot of organizations, like universities and hospitals, have security lockdowns, so we weren't able to use an external one.

But it's good to know that some of these can operate outside of the Zoom window. We had a question about ASL interpreters, whether there are any that are recommended. We cannot endorse particular interpreters in our Zoom today. However, there is a website where you can check the certifications. I don't have it available with me right now, but I'll send it to Althea so she can send it out.

Oh, Arlene, do you know that website?

- I can add to that, that the Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing has a list of interpreters and also real-time captioners, and they can assist you in finding what may be the appropriate person for the job your needs are for. So, you know, they're one of the state agencies, the Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and they do keep a list.

It's on their website as well. They have a list of interpreters and captioners.

- Thank you so much. And then we've had a few other questions about captioning. One about whether we know if there's a move to make better

captioning for TV, as the captioning on TV is not as accurate as that experienced in webinars very often. Arlene, do you happen to know whether there's any movement toward that?

Or anyone else on the...

- Well, I do know that... Well, I assume you're talking about live captioning because anything that's pre-recorded, with some exceptions, I won't even go into that, but if it's pre-recorded, it should be 100% accurate because it's, you know, burnt into the media. But your live programming, which essentially your news programs, that's handled by each station.

So, that's why the quality varies a lot. And it's hit and miss. It's just hit and miss, you could go bang your head. I tend not to watch live news, but there are some stations, I guess, your bigger stations are likely to have better captioning than the ones that are...some are just relying on...well, it used to be really bad if there was just not even captioning kind of words that went on with the story.

But the more remote the station, the worse the captioning in general. So, hello. Welcome to hearing loss, okay? Yeah.

- I have a comment, if I may. Miss Ruth.

- Thank you. Oh, yes, Miss Ruth, please do.

- Yeah, also, along the lines of that, audio description in programs on TV and programs you watch on the internet have been getting better, but not every program is audio described. Audio description is when something is happening in a movie or TV show and there's just action with no dialog, we don't know what's going on.

So, the audio describer is sort of a narrator, more like an actor, part of the story, and they're telling you the backdrop is dark, now they introduce the [inaudible]. So, that sort of thing has made a lot more media that we consume much more accessible. And the ACB, American Council of the Blind, is doing a audio description project, and they have a listing on their website of every program thus far that has been audio described.

They give awards to people who do it really well. So, I think that's a good thing for our community.

- Thank you. And one final question that I think... We had some questions, Arlene, after your discussion about your experiences with municipalities

and...people are interested in solutions that any of you might have about how a local government that would like to make their meetings and everything more inclusive could go about doing that.

- Yes. Right now, New Jersey is now launching or has launched a push to get induction looping into New Jersey. There is a piece of legislation which I helped draft, which requires that all new construction, places of public accommodation as well as all countertops are required to have induction loops, and that would be in the construction code.

So, because it would be in the construction code, it would carry with it an enforcement arm. The ADA requires all this stuff, but you have to complain, and so nothing happens. So, as a corollary to that, this past year, the Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing got funding from its parent organization, the Department of Human Services, of almost a million dollars to fund counties to install induction loops and provide captioning and sign language interpreting.

And so, 12 counties applied for these funds and have induction loop projects that have been completed or are going to be completed. Now, I'm bringing this up because right now we're in the New Jersey budget process, and that funding from the Department of Human Services did not make it into the budget, and we want to make it into the budget.

So, I've already become an expert on New Jersey budget process, and, hopefully, we'll be able to get that, at least a million dollars to, you know, jumpstart getting induction loops installed at the county levels. So, I'm telling you this now and watch for it as notices go out. And the budget hearings are this particular month, so it's important to get that word in that this funding is necessary.

And the more words that are said about this, the better. So, hopefully, that will happen. And one feeds on the other. The legislation put induction looping on the map, and then because it's on the map, oh, there's funding being provided. So, you can see the process here. And it began with my aha moment in the Rayburn Building and somebody should.

So, you're my assistance on this, and the more, the better. So, I'm happy to receive your inquiries and connect. Thank you.

- Yes, Miss Ruth.

- I would say that if they could actually just open those meetings to the public. Many of them are not open. And also, streaming, live streaming, have your

ASL interpreters, they will have their captioning. And also, anytime you speak, say your name, sometimes at first say your title because we need to get to know who the various directors are running things in town.

- [Woman 2] [inaudible].

- I'm sorry, my phone came on. I'm sorry. And also, if you could, I know that there's often presentations. Some of them have graphs, which are hard to access. If it were like a recorded screen here you couldn't access graphs, anything on your screen, just read it in its entirety. It's a PowerPoint presentation, read it from, you know, first sentence to the end so we know what everybody else can see.

And also, just being accessible as people if you're running town meetings. Be accessible to the suggestions people make. It might be outrageous or impossible through the budgets, but listen and acknowledge people, and validate them. Just to hear what those concerns are, do what you can from your position in the office.

- Thank you, Miss Ruth. Kris, did you have something you'd like to add?

- Yes. I just wanted to also add consideration for how you are setting up the room physically for the meeting. Oftentimes, there is a lot of space in the room, but the way it's set up and either has chairs really close together or the aisles are tight, and there's only about very specific designations where someone like me with a physical disability could access a seat.

That depends on whether I have the cane, my wheelchair, my walker, and it is really embarrassing to get stuck trying to get out of an aisle or be in between and not be able to access the exit or the space. So, oftentimes, if that was the previous experience I had, if I was not one of the first people there, I actually would not attend because of those experiences and not being able to physically access the space.

So, kind of having that consideration when considering how you're going to set up tables or the seating is also just something to think about and engage in in terms of accessibility of meetings, especially at the local government as well.

- Thank you. And I believe, Althea, we're out of time for questions. Okay. We do have a slide on our slides near the end where it has everybody's contact information, so if you had a question that you wanted to reach out to us, we're all happy to respond to you as well. And then, Althea, I'll turn it back over to you.

- Yes, thank you, Rebecca, for facilitating such wonderful questions. I do encourage you to continue to reach out. You can email myself or the panelist of interest for any follow-up questions. Thank you. I did want to share the poll results from the accessing Zoom meetings and other online programs, what do you usually do?

Most people, seems like, are pretty self-reliant and figure it out themselves and are able to usually resolve it. There are some people who had had to miss out on meetings or portions of meetings, and I hope that maybe you've gotten some ideas today on how you can resolve those issues in the future or maybe some people that you could reach out to to be able to figure out where you should be reaching out.

So, please don't hesitate to reach out, you know, in the future in case there's anything that we might be able to point you in the direction of. I hope that you will consider this to be your community, too. Thank you. So, I want to move on now to...well, first of all, yeah, I need to make sure we hit the...you know, that our students are able to give their reflections on this meeting, but I wanted to make sure the panelists have a minute in case there's anything that you feel like you wanted to say but didn't get a chance to, to just please chime in, but try to keep it to 30 seconds.

- Yeah, I forgot to tell everybody that I wrote two books on my cochlear implant experience, and it's not just really about cochlear implants, but it is about hearing loss and everything that it impacts. So, those books are still available, and they have actually helped a lot of people. Audiologists all have raved about them to me even now.

And they've been published 10 and 20 years ago, they're still current. So, just Google my name, they're out there. I just wanted to make sure people knew that.

- Great. Thank you, and thank you for your willingness, all three of you, to share and open up. I know it's definitely hard emotional work to be able to share like this in some ways, too. So I really appreciate it. Miss Ruth, you had something to share.

- I just wanted to thank you, Althea and Rebecca and everybody on this team because you've made this a priority, and it's really important to note that you made us feel so welcome. We were able to open up with ideas we wouldn't have otherwise. So, I want to thank you all for that.

- Thank you. And, Kris, do you have anything else you wanted to say before we move on to reflections from Rebecca and Nimit?

- Yes. I just wanted to echo the thank you and also just remind or leave the last thought that within accessibility and inclusion, to involve the community that you're programming for at every level, from development to implementation, to evaluating it and making changes.

- Thank you very much for sharing that. Very important. Great. So, now I want to invite up our two grad students from Rutgers School of Social Work to offer some closing reflections.

And then after that, I will open up a poll, one final poll, that has some kind of reflection questions. So, I do hope you'll be able to stay and respond to those. So, first, Rebecca Martin, who is a PhD student at Rutgers School of Social Work, to come up and offer some remarks.

- Thank you. One second. Got to get my notes here. Okay. I'd like to provide some reflections about the experience of working together as a cross-disability group of self-advocates working to plan this event. One major takeaway is that all of the great information we have heard here today is just a starting point. There is a saying that you may have heard, "If you've met a person with a disability, you've met one person with a disability."

The reality is that there are some actions that promote greater inclusion in virtual spaces, but there's no one-size-fits-all solution that will help you "get it right" all of the time. Virtual accessibility and accessibility in general should be thought of as an ever-evolving practice, not a finish line. What is needed at your events could vary week to week by who is participating, and some people with disabilities have conditions that are variable and could be best suited by different accommodations at different times.

As we worked together over a number of weeks in this working group, there were times we each had to ask for adjustments in our working process, and we each also had turns providing those accommodations to others. Much of what we experienced pushed us each into slightly uncomfortable practices, working to alter speech rates for greater comprehension, talking through how to adjust the camera of a person with vision impairment so that someone with hearing impairments could read their lips, working through various perspectives on screen reader-accessible PDFs, just to name a few examples.

But when I asked the other participants about their experiences in preparation for this reflection, the beauty of this process was not found in the accessibility solutions, it was found in the focus on centering each person's lived experiences in the ways in which we sought to affirm that each person is an expert of their own lives and the ways in which we all worked to ensure the good-of-the-group experience over any one of our individual experiences.

So, I will leave you with this. Please think of accessibility, virtual or otherwise, as a process, as a central consideration that aims at creating equity for all participants to have full access and sense of inclusion. The best way to ensure virtual accessibility as someone running a virtual event is to ask your participants how you can better meet their accessibility needs and to work together with participants who might have conflicting needs to find a solution that will provide the greatest equity of access.

And if as a person who is neurotypical and who does not have disabilities you find yourself doing everything in a way that is most comfortable to you in a virtual event, please use that realization as a nudge to reflect on whether accessibility needs are being adequately addressed. Thank you.

- Beautiful.

- Thank you.

- Oh, my goodness.

- Thank you, Rebecca. And Nimit Kaur, who is a MSW student, class of 2023 at Rutgers, a digital accessibility consultant, and an ADA compliance expert.

- [Nimit] Thank you. Thank you for the invitation. And all of the panelists and speakers, Rebecca, you have been really great. And thank you, Althea, for organizing this. I just want to say, as professionals, some of the things that I have heard here today and experienced with working in this working digital group is really aligned with our core values of social work, which I think really helps any profession, especially in the human services and helping profession stand out and address some of these challenges and accessibility barriers.

One of that is social injustice. We are really creating solutions to accessibility challenges and barriers in order to create opportunities for everyone. Some of these accessibilities barriers even hinder opportunities for access to information, education and employment opportunities, as well as social opportunities.

So, it's important that as professionals we advocate for and with people in order to create solutions to some of these barriers. And dignity and worth of every person we meet, being respectful of every person we meet without the preconceived notions that we may have heard, treating each individual as individual, not as their disabilities defined by their disabilities.

So, it's important that we respect the dignity and worth of everyone. And lastly, importance of human relationships. I think this is the most important, that we want to involve participants and make them centers of their own lives when we are working to create solutions to some of these barriers. Being able to be open-minded, and involving people, and asking them, "What would be best for your need? How can we help you? How can we do this together in a collaborative process rather than us as professionals creating solutions?"

So basically, including people as centers of their own lives. We really hope that you are able to take some of these techniques and tools and apply them in your settings in order to increase opportunities for everyone through the lens of a human-centered approach and keeping an open mind and collaborative effort with persons with lived experiences.

Accessibility is not a separate phenomenon, rather it's actually inclusive and productivity for everyone involved. For example, closed captioning, even though it is helpful and more great for people with hearing loss, but it actually also helps people who are second English learners, and it helps them also conversational and English as well.

So, it's not helping just a subset of populations, it's actually creating opportunities and including everyone involved. Same goes with access to materials in various formats. This is helpful for anyone.

And the point here is to equalize and level the playing field for everyone and create inclusive opportunities. Thank you to all the panelists and speakers for your great conversations today, and thank you so much to everyone who attended. Please feel free to reach out to us at any time, and we would be more than happy to engage in further conversations with you all.

Thank you.

- Thank you very much, Nimit and Rebecca. We are so glad to have you as the future of social work practice and research. And we appreciate all of our speakers and the interpreters today, Andrew and Ariana. I launched the poll that has some more open-ended questions, mostly about your experience

here today. We'd love to hear about what you've learned and what you're going to take back to your communities and workplaces.

I also want to put up on the screen the contact information for all of the people that spoke today as well as the four organizations that are hosting this event. This information is also in the PDF that was emailed out yesterday, so... But please let me know if you're missing it and if there's any other information that you'd like and if you'd like to keep in touch.

This was truly a community effort to make this event happen, and I'm grateful for each and every one of you.

- And we're grateful for you, too.

- Thank you.

- Thank you for making this wonderful.

- [crosstalk] hard work.

- Great job.

- Thank you.

- Thank you so much.