

Accessible and Inclusive Telework Practices Using Microsoft Teams During the COVID-19 Pandemic (Version 2)

Last Updated July 14, 2020¹

Microsoft (MS) Teams provides helpful features in order to virtually meet during the COVID-19 global pandemic. However, MS Teams requires additional actions, many of which are identified below, to make Teams meetings accessible and to ensure participation for persons with disabilities. This document identifies the necessary steps to ensure accessibility and inclusivity during MS Teams meetings to meet the agency's obligations under Sections 501, 504, and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, 29 U.S.C. § 701 *et seq.*

Known Teams Accessibility Barriers

- (1) **Screen share** is not accessible to persons with disabilities, such as blind persons, who use screen readers, magnification, require sufficient color contrast, or use other types of assistive technology.
- (2) Although auto-captioning is available for Teams Meetings and Live Events, it is generated by artificial intelligence which results in errors, making it insufficient for effective communication and should not solely be relied upon. Navigation of the Windows 10 Teams app has been difficult for some persons with disabilities, such as persons who rely on keyboard navigation and/or screen reader software. Similar difficulties exist during meetings due to conflict in audible information.

Tips for Organizers of Teams Meetings

- The obligation to ensure effective communication during meetings rests with the agency. Any reasonable accommodations that must be provided during the meeting should be organized in advance. Since a meeting organizer will not always know that a person with a disability will attend the meeting and will require an accommodation, the organizer may ask:

If you require a reasonable accommodation to participate in the meeting (e.g., an interpreter, captioning, or large print), please contact [xxx] by email at [xxx] or by phone at [xxx] no later than [xxx].

Most virtual meeting accommodations are simple to provide, such as providing documents in advance (as described below) or adding or changing to a call-in number. Meeting organizers will generally be able to provide such accommodations on their own. If you need additional assistance in securing reasonable accommodations for virtual meetings, including assistive technology and auxiliary aids and services, individuals who can assist are listed at the end of this document.

¹ Following publication of the original version of this document in April 2020, Microsoft made a number of accessibility enhancements to Teams, which are reflected in this version.

- Add a Teams conference line for persons who may have difficulty navigating the app. Alternatively, for internal users having difficulty using Teams, offer to join the meeting from the Teams app [by adding the individual as a participant](#).
- Because the Teams screenshare is not accessible, speak as if the meeting is conducted only via teleconference. Circulate documents and any agenda in advance in the meeting invite (in an accessible format, as described below). Share files and presentations through the conversation window along with any screenshare to allow persons with disabilities to open in MS applications to use with assistive technology. When navigating to a page or part of a document, announce to participants the location or what is being shown. Ensure such documents are accessible/Section 508 compliant before circulating by using the built-in [Accessibility Checker](#) and referring to [MS accessibility trainings](#). To the greatest extent feasible, share documents in Word to ensure greatest accessibility, e.g., the ability to enlarge text. If you must use PDF, also share an accessible Word copy.
- Captioning, sign language interpretation, and/or other auxiliary aids and services will be necessary to ensure effective communication with persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have speech disabilities during Teams conferences. While Teams now offers live captioning functionality, persons with communication-related disabilities may also require services such as Relay Conference Captioning, IP Relay, or Video Relay Service (VRS) through the [Federal Relay Service](#) or use HUD interpreters using Skype, FaceTime, or other chat or video platform simultaneously during such a meeting. This will likely work best when using multiple devices – e.g., a laptop and a mobile device – and may not work on the same device. Such Relay Service “communications assistants” and interpreters must be provided access to the meeting like participants.
- Some of the secondary functionality in Teams is not accessible for persons with vision disabilities. For example, chat functionality and the use of gifs are not accessible. Until such time as MS updates the software to be accessible, stick to the basics during meetings (e.g., only use the voice call features along with any auxiliary aids and services necessary for accessibility).
- During Teams meetings, remind all speakers to identify themselves prior to each time they speak, and request that participants who are not speaking keep microphones muted to reduce static and other noise interference.

Tips for Users with Vision Disabilities Using Teams

- Teams is available as an iPhone app and works with VoiceOver and other built in iOS assistive technology. While the placement of certain features in the iOS version of Teams will differ from the Office365 version, users may find it more intuitive. Use of the iOS app allows users to answer calls placed through Teams like standard phone calls.
- If using JAWS or NVDA, MS recommends using the Office365 Teams app in the Google Chrome browser.

- Freedom Scientific has produced a [webinar on how to use JAWS with MS Teams](#).
- MS has produced [guidance on the use of a screen reader with Teams on Windows](#).
- MS Teams offers a number of keyboard shortcuts that can help these users navigate a Teams meeting efficiently and effectively. A list of these shortcuts is available at <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/keyboard-shortcuts-for-microsoft-teams-2e8e2a70-e8d8-4a19-949b-4c36dd5292d2#picktab=windows>.
- MS has produced other [guidance on use of Teams on other platforms, including mobile and via a web browser](#).

Tips for Users with Hearing and Speech Disabilities Using Teams

- MS Teams now offers live captioning. To turn on the live captioning functioning, select the “Live Captioning (preview)” option under the “more actions” tab. The “more actions” tab can be accessed by clicking on the “. . .” button once you have joined a Teams meeting.
- In addition to utilizing Live Captioning, we also recommend having a VRS Provider participate in the meeting. To do so, contact Jeff Salit at jeffrey.l.salit@hud.gov, who will enable the call-in feature for your meeting. Once a call-in number is provided, contact the VRS and provide the interpreter with the call-in number to listen to the meeting. Note that VRS works best **in conjunction with** the MS Teams live captioning function.
- Use of the VRS for conference captioning requires [24 hours advance notice](#).
- HUD interpreter service requests may be made by contacting InterpreterServices@hud.gov.

Contacts for Additional Assistance

For questions related to the provision of assistive technology and solutions to resolve accessibility barriers with information and communications technology, please contact OCIO’s Section 508 and Assistive Technology Program Manager, Jeff Salit at Jeffrey.L.Salit@hud.gov or (202) 402-7507.

To add conference call functionality to Teams meetings, contact Danny Myers at danny.myers@hud.gov and Debbie Jankowski at debbie.jankowski@hud.gov.

For questions related to the provision of reasonable accommodations, please contact OCHCO’s Reasonable Accommodation Branch at Reasonableaccommodationbranch@hud.gov or (202) 402-4690.

To receive support directly from MS, please contact its [Disability Answer Desk](#).

You may also refer all questions related to the agency's compliance with Sections 501, 504, and 508, as well as the information in this document, to the Office of General Counsel's Assistant General Counsel for Fair Housing Compliance, William Lynch at william.f.lynch@hud.gov, via Skype, Teams, or (202) 402-6280.