Accessible and Inclusive Telework Practices Using Microsoft Teams During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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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 with 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) While MS is developing a **beta version of closed captioning** functionality for Teams, this feature is not yet available, and auto-captioning is not effective for communication.

(3) **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.

- 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). 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. Teams does not have a plug-in for such communication support like other web-based conferencing platforms, such as WebEx or YouTube Live. Persons with communication-related disabilities may use services such as Relay Conference Captioning, IP Relay, or Video Relay 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 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

- Some Teams meetings may allow a link to be provided to captioner or interpreter; however, video capability is currently turned off for Teams meetings. It may be preferable to have a HUD or Relay Service captioner or interpreter join the Teams meeting and also connect via Skype or another platform to communicate. You may consider using multiple devices for best connectivity. To avoid feedback, all devices should be muted, except one when necessary to provide audio.

- Use of the Federal Relay Service 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.