Digital Accessibility: Driving Disability Inclusion in the Workplace

June 22, 2021
Our Moderator

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Today’s Presenters

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Hosting Accessible Virtual Meetings and Presentations

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Corinne Weible, Co-Director
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About PEAT

Our Vision
A future where all technologies are born accessible, so that everyone can succeed in their careers.

Our Mission
To foster collaborations that make emerging technologies accessible. To support workplaces in using inclusive technologies that engage the skills of employees with disabilities. To build a future that works.

Who is behind PEAT?
The Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology (PEAT) is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP).
Join PEAT and leading HR blog Workology.com to explore how emerging technology trends in the workplace are impacting people with disabilities.

Podcast: Ethics and Bias in Artificial Intelligence (AI) Technology

Merve Hickok, Founder of Alethicist.org, discusses the risks employers carry when they use AI-enabled technology in HR and the questions they should ask vendors to avoid bias and discrimination. [...]

May 26th, 2021
The Future of Work: Trends, Technology & Policy

The world of work is changing. Increasing numbers of employees are working remotely, and they rely on multiple technologies to stay connected to their employers, clients, and collaborators. Workplace technology is also changing, with virtual meetings, artificial intelligence (AI) and extended reality (XR) rising rapidly into mainstream use. But where do people with disabilities fit into these trends? The following resources explore the potential of technology to break barriers in the workplace, and how employers, developers, designers, and others can help build a future of work that is born accessible.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)
AI-powered platforms are now used to screen job applicants, streamline the application process, and provide on-the-job training. While AI holds tremendous potential for both employers and employees to make workplaces more inclusive, it also carries risks for people with disabilities related to privacy, ethics, and bias.

Autonomous Vehicles (AV)
If developed with accessibility at the forefront, AV offers a renewed opportunity to tackle one of the most difficult issues our society has been attempting to overcome for decades: equitable access to transportation and employment.

Digital Accessibility
With digital devices, platforms, and documents becoming the primary methods used by individuals to execute work and engage in daily life, its more important than ever for employers to prioritize digital accessibility for employees and job applicants.

Extended Reality (XR)
XR is changing the way we interact with the world around us, and will undoubtedly shape the future of work. In fact, companies are already using these immersive technologies to train staff, enhance collaboration, and market products and services.
The Future of Work for People with Disabilities

A Video Conversation Celebrating Global Accessibility Awareness Day (GAAD)

Lydia X. Z. Brown
Policy Counsel, Center for Democracy & Technology

Chancey Fleet
Technology Educator

Haley Moss
Attorney and Educator

Ather Sharif
Software Engineer at Comcast and Founder of EvoXLabs

PEAT: Building a future that works
Considering Human Diversity

- Visual
- Cognitive
- Physical
- Communication
- Emotional
- Socio-Economic
- Intersectional
What is Accessibility?

Accessibility means that everyone can use the exact same technology as anyone else, regardless of whether:

• they can manipulate a mouse
• how much vision they have
• how many colors they can see
• how much they can hear
• how they process information
Dimensions of Inclusive Design

- **Recognize diversity and uniqueness**
  - Design beyond “the average” offer choice/flexibility

- **Inclusive process and tools**
  - Include diverse perspectives / people with lived experiences, collaborate in an inclusive way

- **Broader beneficial impact**
  - Leverage “curb-cut effects”, broader value for the technology

*Source: Inclusive Design Research Centre, OCAD University, “What is Inclusive Design?”*
Employment and Technology

- **Over 1 billion people worldwide** have a disability. The labor force participation rate for people with disabilities is **less than half** than the rate for people without disabilities.¹

- Making emerging technologies accessible could bring **350M people with disabilities into the global workforce**²

- Companies who hire people with disabilities **earn 28% higher revenue, 2X the net income and 30% higher economic profit margins** than their peers.³

**Sources:**
¹. US Dept of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, Disability Employment Statistics
². Accenture, “Amplify accessibility: An accessible digital future”
³. Accenture, “Getting to Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage”
2020: A Year of Rapid Change

- Digitization accelerated rapidly
  What occurred in 8 months would have otherwise taken 3-7 years (McKinsey)

- Expanded access for some
  - Remote options are now provided by default, and a richer experience
  - Cost/time barriers minimized

- C-Suite level recognition for challenges that people with disabilities have long faced across the business ecosystem

- Telework has normalized. Businesses know they must reinvent their practices to make telework presences equal to in-person experiences
The Challenges are Magnified

People with disabilities face magnified challenges when technology — and organizational culture — isn't accessible and inclusive.

- Platform limitations/interoperability
  - Inconsistent quality and user experience
  - Accessibility can vary by license level
- Conflicting accommodation needs
  - Remote meetings are less accessible for some
- Inexperiece with new tools, paired with limitations on tech support for people using assistive technology remotely
- Bandwidth & broadband access
2021: The Work Ahead

- **The Challenge:**
  - Companies are quickly building a new wave of virtual infrastructure, but they may not be prioritizing accessibility

- **The Opportunity:**
  - We’re at a unique moment in time to push the needle forward
  - Disability experiences can foster new and transformative ways to think about how we work
Telework and Accessibility

Many employers and employees have shifted to telework. PEAT is here to help with the transition to ensure your digital communications and platforms are as accessible as possible for everyone, including people with disabilities.

The recent shift to telework for a staggering number of government and private sector employees has caused a surge in the use of digital communications systems. Employers and employees are now relying heavily on digital technologies to conduct business, collaborate with colleagues, host virtual events, and recruit and hire employees.

With digital devices, platforms, and documents becoming the primary methods used by individuals to execute work and engage in daily life, it’s more important than ever to prioritize digital accessibility. We’ve created the following resources to help equip employers with the information needed to ensure the digital workplace is accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities.

Accessible Digital Communications

Creating Accessible Content

- Learn how to create accessible emails, PDFs, documents, images, presentations, social media, multimedia, and content management systems by following these basic tips on digital accessibility from PEAT.

- Double check that your website is accessible by reviewing these ten tips for an accessible website.

Hosting Meetings and Presentations

- Review these seven essential steps and related resources to help create accessible presentations.

- Learn how to pick an accessible virtual meeting platform.

- Once you’ve learned the process from the above articles, use this checklist to ensure that you take all necessary steps before, during, and after the meeting.

Staff Training & Devices

- Accessibility is a team effort, so all employees need to understand the basics of disability inclusion and digital accessibility. Refer to PEAT’s staff training resources, which include detailed guidance on training employees in specific roles.
Before and during your presentation
Step 1: Research

Research the accessibility capabilities of online platform you intend to use. Be sure you consider what capabilities you will need for the specific presentation you are planning:

- File sharing
- Screen sharing
- Chat
- Whiteboard
- Polling/interaction tools
- Videos

- Multiple speakers
- Breakout rooms

If the above features aren’t accessible, consider how you can creatively restructure the meeting without them.
Welcome to **Buy IT!**

Welcome to **Buy IT!**, the online resource that helps employers and their purchasing staff build accessibility and usability into their information and communication technology (ICT) procurement processes. Brought to you by the Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology (PEAT), **Buy IT** helps ensure that the ICT you buy and implement works for everyone—including employees, job seekers, and customers with disabilities.
Step 5: Negotiating Contracts

So the RFP responses came in, you evaluated the proposals, and now you’re ready to make a contract award! What comes next? That’s contract development and negotiation—which offers another opportunity to clearly spell out your accessibility requirements. Below is some model procurement language you can use when developing and negotiating a contract with a vendor. This language mirrors (but is not identical to) the suggested model language for solicitations, and is broken into four sections.

Model Procurement Language

The first section specifies that ICT products or services furnished under the contract must be accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities, consistent with federal and state laws. It includes a “safe harbor” statement, meaning the contractor will be considered to satisfy the accessibility requirement if it meets the functional performance criteria specified in Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level A and AA Success Criteria (2008). Second, the contractor must maintain and retain full documentation of measures taken to ensure compliance with the accessibility criteria, including tests and simulations conducted. Third, the contractor must agree to remEDIATE (repair or replace) non-compliant products or services. Finally, the term ICT is defined.

Requirements and Standards

Each information and communication technology (hereinafter referred to as “ICT”) product or service furnished under this contract shall be accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (hereinafter referred to as the “ADA”) and other applicable federal laws, including Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, and State laws and implementing regulations. For purposes of this clause, [the contractor] shall be considered in compliance with the ADA and other federal and state laws if it satisfies the requirements (including exceptions) specified in the regulations [36 CFR Part 1194] implementing Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, including the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level A and Level A.
Step 2: Need Sensing

1) The invitation and/or registration form should include the following:
   • What accommodations you are providing by default
   • An invitation for participants to share their accommodation needs with the organizer. It’s a good idea to give a deadline of at least 1-2 weeks prior to the meeting in case you need to recruit an interpreter.

2) Set up accounts with vendors for captioning and sign language interpreters so that you can easily contact them when needed.
Provide in all meetings by default

- 10-digit call-in number for relay access
- Meeting materials in an accessible format, provided beforehand
- Captions
  - Live CART is the best option. AI-powered automatic captions are also available (by default in some platforms)
- Monitored ways for attendees to be in touch (chat, email, cell)
- Long meetings must include regular breaks
Step 3: Put Systems in Place

Before your live event starts, check off these critical to-do items first:

• Determine who will play various roles

• Confirm that your meeting has a 10-digit call-in number associated with it (not just a URL to join), and that it is available to attendees

• Make sure presenters have access to a high-quality mic and webcam

• Adjust your platform settings to record your presentation. Though this may not be specifically requested, it’s helpful for everyone to access content after the live event concludes.

• Arrange captioning for your presentation in advance (such as through the Federal Relay Service for government employees or another service provider).

• Secure sign language interpreters—if requested.
Step 4: Create Accessible Materials

In advance of your presentation, create and share accessible slide decks and other presentation materials with the audience.

PEAT has links to resources for creating accessible presentation materials, including:

- How to Make Presentations Accessible to All
- PowerPoint Accessibility
- Best Practices for Making Word Documents Accessible
Step 5: Prepare Speakers

For a presentation to be fully accessible, speakers must understand how to use key features of the online platform and convey content in a manner that promotes accessibility.

• Conduct a dry-run with presenters to verify their familiarity and comfort with the run of show and platform controls (e.g., screen sharing, muting/unmuting audio, etc.).

• Remind speakers/meeting leader/chat monitor of meeting rules such as:
  • One person speaks at a time, all other mics will be muted
  • Say your name (every time) before speaking
  • Describe what you are showing/doing on screen, including images and videos
  • Make it easy to queue speakers
During your presentation
Starting the meeting

• Review house keeping and ground rules
• Post call-in number, captioning info on opening slide and in chat and read aloud
• Re-post any links or attachments sent in invitation
• Announce if you are recording
• Note any post-meeting information/links
Facilitating the meeting

• Mute email/other notifications
• Close unrelated apps and content
• Watch for alerts from chat monitor
  • Have chat monitor read aloud items/questions in the chat before answering
• When multiple people have asked to speak, announce the order so they can plan ahead
• Remember to describe visuals
Manage contributors

• Allow time for participants to add notes in the chat or ask to speak
• Provide multiple ways to collect feedback
• Avoid letting any one person dominate the audio
• Recognize that there are many reasons people may not be quick to jump in
• Do not require attendees to turn on their cameras
Strategies for ensuring inclusion

- Pause at key points: ask if anyone else has something to add
- Don’t just take silence as agreement. Some options:
  - Chat: +1 if agree; a -1 if they disagree
  - Go through roster of attendees
- If one person is dominating, consider asking for other feedback
After your presentation
Step 6: Share Materials

After the event concludes, disseminate a recording of your presentation and the transcript to participants.

This best practice enhances the accessibility of the information you shared and affords people with and without disabilities more opportunities to review and better understand the content you presented.
Step 7: Ask for Feedback

When sharing materials from your presentation, ask participants for feedback on the content of the presentation, its utility, and their experiences with the accessibility of your virtual event.
Resources

• **Telework and Accessibility**

  Learn more about how to foster accessibility for all your digital materials (e.g., emails, PDFs, social media posts, etc.) by reviewing PEAT’s [digital accessibility basics](#).

• Watch a recording and access PowerPoint slides from this recent presentation: “Creating and Hosting an Accessible Online Presentation”

• Utilize additional tips for virtual meetings and presentations: “Accessibility Tips for a Better Zoom/Virtual Meeting Experience”
Staff Training Resources

Once your company is on the path to an accessible technology mindset, you're ready to take action. It's time to start implementing inclusive technology practices within your workplace. But these efforts will only be successful if relevant staff across your organization share your understanding of accessibility practices. For example, if you implement a policy requiring that all company documents and PDFs be made accessible, you'll need to train employees on what that means and why it's important. Similarly, if you instruct your web developers to make your website accessible, they may or may not know what that means. And that's where training and professional development come into play.

General staff training on accessibility basics goes hand in hand with training on diversity and disability awareness. It should cover the following subjects:

- Disability basics and the typical barriers people with disabilities encounter in the workplace.
- The advantages of an inclusive workplace and your organization's overall commitment to diversity.
- Typical solutions to these barriers, focusing on the fact that there are solutions available for almost every situation.
Digital Accessibility Tips

- Use the Accessibility Checker in Microsoft Office
- Add well-written alt text to images
- Use heading structures in documents, emails, and websites
- Avoid sending pdf documents (or include an alternative)
- Don’t rely on visual cues like bold text, italics, underlining, and color
Digital Accessibility Tips, continued

• Use CamelCase for websites and social media hashtags #BestPractice
• Include captions and transcripts for audio/video (including live)
• Invite participants to request accommodations prior to an event
• Write in plain language
• Use informative link text
  • Good: “Download the report” Bad: ”Click here”
Thank You!

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Future of Work Resources:
• Peatworks.org/futureofwork
• Peatworks.org/podcast
• Peatworks.org/GAAD2021

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Resources (1)

**Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) -** [https://askearn.org/](https://askearn.org/)

**Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology (PEAT) -** [https://www.peatworks.org/](https://www.peatworks.org/)
- [https://www.peatworks.org/how-to-pick-an-accessible-virtual-meeting-platform/](https://www.peatworks.org/how-to-pick-an-accessible-virtual-meeting-platform/)
- [https://www.peatworks.org/digital-accessibility-toolkits/buy-it/](https://www.peatworks.org/digital-accessibility-toolkits/buy-it/)
- [https://www.peatworks.org/digital-accessibility-toolkits/staff-training-resources/](https://www.peatworks.org/digital-accessibility-toolkits/staff-training-resources/)
- [https://www.peatworks.org/digital-accessibility-toolkits/talentworks/](https://www.peatworks.org/digital-accessibility-toolkits/talentworks/)
Resources (2)

Job Accommodation Network (JAN) - https://askjan.org/
- https://askjan.org/topics/tech.cfm
- https://askjan.org/topics/onlineapps.cfm

Center on Knowledge Translation for Employment Research (CeKTER)

The Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communication Technologies (G3ict) - https://g3ict.org/

International Association of Accessibility Professionals (IAAP) - https://www.accessibilityassociation.org/

W3C Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) - https://www.w3.org/WAI/
EARN’s Summer Workplace Inclusion Webinar Series

The ADA@31: A Conversation with Bobby Silverstein and Susan Mazrui
• Thursday, July 29, 2021, 2:00 – 3:00 pm EDT

Telework in Action: A Disability Inclusion Practice Whose Time Has Arrived
• Thursday, August 12, 2021, 2:00 – 3:00 pm EDT

For more information and to register, visit https://askearn.org/event/
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