Designing for Accessibility

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The most effective online learning experiences draw on what we know from adult learning principles, accessibility advocates, privacy experts, and visual designers. They balance practical outcomes, accessibility, design, and tools to foster interaction, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. Creating accessible trainings is often about planning ahead and incorporating accessibility into the design of the training itself. For example, while maintaining visual interest during online trainings is important, it's also essential to balance this with language and learning needs. Too many screen changes, too much motion, and too much visual stimulation may make it difficult for people with learning processing delays and people relying on interpretation, particularly ASL interpretation, or closed captions to adequately focus on the key points (Vera Institute and APIGBV, 2019). Considering accessibility throughout all aspects of curriculum design is an equally important part of designing successful online trainings. The learning needs of sexual assault advocates and community partners may necessitate building multiple versions of online trainings or offering trainings on topics in both online and in-person formats. This may be true for both sexual assault advocacy core curricula and continuing education for advocates and partners.

When designing for accessibility in online learning spaces, coalitions need to consider technology accessibility, language accessibility, privacy, and visual accessibility. *Technology accessibility* covers whether people have the physical tools to complete the training, like a reliable and strong internet connection, whether people know how to use the learning platform and tools, and whether

the tools work for people with disabilities. *Language accessibility* refers to having the platform and materials available in multiple languages, including visual languages such as American Sign Language (ASL). *Privacy* refers to the ability of users to choose what information they want to share online and with whom. *Visual accessibility* includes making sure all materials are easily readable, regardless of language or physical ability. Each online learning tool or platform has different accessibility and privacy tools, so finding the right platform or learning management system to deliver online trainings often involves calling companies to find out if their tools match the needs of the people the coalition trains.

Depending on the specific content of the online trainings, coalitions should also take special care to consider participants' privacy options when designing trainings. For example, coalitions may offer webinars on different aspects of financial management. Participants may have a strong desire to learn and ask questions but may not engage if the coalition is also the grant administrator for fear of outing their program. When offering legal webinars or trainings, advocates may want to participate anonymously so any questions they ask will not be tied to a region or location. Even presenters may have privacy concerns about where recorded webinars are stored and who has access to that information. The social media presence of immigrants in the process of applying for green cards or citizenship status matters; how search results associated with their name show up can have a big impact. Different platforms offer different levels of privacy and anonymity for people participating in webinars and learning modules and for recording options.

Much has already been written on these topics by groups such as the [Vera Institute of Justice](#), the [Web Accessibility Initiative](#), [Web Accessibility in Mind (Web AIM),](#) the [National Network to End Domestic Violence's SafetyNet Project,](#) [the Asian and Pacific Islander Institute on Gender-Based Violence (APIGBV)](#), and the [National Latin@ Network](#). Rather than repeat information available through those sources, we've compiled a list of questions and considerations unique to online training for coalitions to consider as they design and implement their online trainings. For more in-depth discussion and guidance on these topics, we

recommend consulting the existing resources linked above. Though the lists of questions below may seem formidable, coalitions may standardize some of the processes over time, making designing accessible trainings easier and easier.

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Creating Accessible Outreach, Registration Forms, and Learning Platforms
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☐ Are all outreach materials available in multiple languages?

☐ Are all fields in the registration form translated into the most commonly used languages?

☐ Do the registration forms ask clear and direct questions about accessibility needs? See sample below.

☐ Is there a clear registration deadline listed on all outreach and registration forms that allows enough time to address access needs such as hiring interpreters and getting materials translated?

☐ Are all of the automatic notices (training reminders, progress reports, etc.) translated into the languages people select during registration?

☐ Are all warning messages and help windows translated into the languages people select during registration?

☐ Is there up-to-date contact information for a person who can assist with any language or access needs on all registration forms and outreach materials?
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Sample Accessibility Registration Questions

Adapted from Resource Sharing Project ReShape, January 2016

Accessibility Questions
1. Do you need closed captioning?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2. Do you need large print materials?
   a. Yes

b. No

3. What form of interpretation do you need?
    a. No interpretation
    b. Spanish language interpretation
    c. ASL interpretation
    d. Other (when folks put this, follow up with them for more specifics)

4. Please let us know if you have any other accessibility needs

Planning to Address Internet Access Issues
Access to reliable high-speed internet with consistent upload and download speeds may be harder to find for people living in rural communities, territories, and low-income communities. A map compiled by online rural news site Daily Yonder demonstrates the disparities between rural and urban internet access in the continental United States. To address issues related to internet access, it can help to think about: ☐ What are the webinar platform's minimum recommended upload and download speeds? Zoom and GoToWebinar list theirs online, as an example, though it may still be best to contact the webinar platform directly to ask about bandwidth issues when also using other accessibility features. ☐ Are all images and downloadable resources compressed to reduce file size and download times? ☐ Are materials available for people to use on a DVD, USB drive, or other non-Internet based format? ☐ Does the coalition periodically offer in-person opportunities to learn the same skills? If you know the file size of your training content, a download or upload speed calculator can help coalitions understand how long it will take someone to download or upload a file based on their internet speeds in seconds, minutes, or hours. *Download speed* refers to how long it would

take to retrieve a file from the internet and display it on a computer or mobile device. *Upload speed* refers to how long it would take to send a file from a computer or mobile device to a website or email server.

Planning to Address Online Privacy

Online privacy is an important part of supporting a culture of consent around data collection and an important part of maintaining confidentiality. Some privacy concerns to consider when offering online learning opportunities include:

- ☐ What demographic or other identifying information are you collecting for registration and why?
- ☐ Will the webinar be recorded? If it will be recorded, what will be included in the recording and who will have access to the recording?
  - o For example, GoToWebinar only saves and sends the chat log to the webinar host and Zoom has a setting that allows meeting hosts to only record their webcam.
- ☐ Will the chat box show up in recordings? If so, what identity-related information is included in the chat?
  - o It is helpful to consider privacy concerns about location when developing check-in questions. For example, many facilitators ask people to share their name and location in the chat box as a default check-in question at the beginning of webinars. This may have unintended privacy and safety impacts for some people or programs.
- ☐ Can people participate in webinars and interactive e-learning anonymously?
  - o For example, Moodle automatically collects and logs the IP address of anyone who logs into the system so changing a user name may offer some level of privacy, but a coalition can still identify where an advocate signed in from based on their IP address information.
- ☐ What participant information does the coalition save and for how long? Who has access to that information? And if a participant wants to see or change any of that information, are they able to do that?

Planning to Address Technology Literacy

Many people may be unfamiliar with how to access or use important functions or complete fundamental actions for successful online learning. Creating short tutorial videos that teach and show step-by-step how to complete these actions is one way to increase everyone's comfort and ability to successfully learn online. Coalitions may create an online learning module that is only about learning how to use the training platform itself and/or they may embed these videos in help menus within individual online courses.

Some skills coalitions may wish to create training videos for include:

☐ How to find online training courses
☐ How to create a user name or register, if necessary
☐ How to sign in and sign out
☐ How to save their progress
☐ How to check their progress and course completion
☐ Description of important buttons and how to use all of the controls (e.g., open, save, type, format fonts, delete, undo, edit, upload, download, open to new tab)
☐ How to use all of the accessibility controls (e.g., closed caption, color contrast setting, font size adjustment, changing default language)
☐ How to use all the interactive tools (e.g., puzzles, quizzes, polls, whiteboards, drag-and-drop)
☐ How to request alternative (non-online) access to the training
☐ How to download files that are available for later use

Designing Inclusive and Accessible Curriculum and Materials

☐ Are course materials written at an accessible reading level (grade 8 or below)?

☐ Do all images have [alternative text](#) available to support screen readers and people with slow internet connections who may not be able to download all images?

☐ Do all videos include captions and subtitles or offer accurate transcripts?

☐ Are webpages formatted correctly to [support screen reader accessibility](#)?

☐ Is there working contact information for people who need help with tech access?

Designing [Accessible Visual Materials](#)

☐ Is all text size 24 or larger?

☐ Do all materials predominantly use an easy-to-read [sans serif font](#)?

☐ Does all text have a high level of contrast with the background colors?

☐ Is the use of text kept to a minimum (e.g. six words per line, six lines per slide)?

☐ Depending on the platform you're using, is there space for captioning at the bottom of the slide so that slide text or images are not covered?

☐ When text is used, is it clear and descriptive?

Translations Review

☐ Are all written materials translated into the most commonly requested languages for your coalition?

☐ Are all platform instructions translated into the most commonly requested languages for your coalition?

☐ If you are creating different versions of training modules for each language, are all online learning materials comparable?

Learning About Available Language Access Tools

☐ What options are available for multilingual simultaneous interpretation?

☐ How does the online training software handle closed captions? Are they always on? Can they be turned on and off as needed?

☐ When recording webinars with closed captions, are the captions embedded in the recording or do they need to be added in via transcript?

☐ What options does the platform have to address user-generated text in multiple languages?

☐ How will the coalition translate user-generated text?

☐ What options are available for ASL or other signed language interpretation?

☐ How do people participating in the trainings access these tools? Which ones need to be enabled before a training session begins?

☐ How does your online training platform translate labels, fields, and help instructions on the platform itself?

☐ How much does the online training platform allow training participants to customize the use of the tools? For example, can someone move the video of the ASL interpreter to a different place on their screen for better ease of viewing? Can someone change the font size or color of closed captions?

Reviewing Accessibility of Interactive Tools

How will language access and disability access tools work with the interactive elements of an online training? Consider:

☐ Chat boxes
☐ Polls
☐ Discussion forums
☐ Live chat sessions
☐ Online collaborative white boards
☐ Breakout rooms
☐ Phone lines

Vetting and Working with Interpreters, Translators, and Captioners
☐ Does the interpreter/translator/captioner have experience providing interpretation online? ☐ Does the interpreter/translator/captioner have experience using the specific platform your coalition uses? ☐ Does the interpreter/translator/captioner have experience working with sexual assault service providers or preventionists?   ○ If not, what vocabulary or concepts may be helpful to review? For example, many languages do not have an exact match for the term *advocate* when referring to a person. ☐ How will you check in with each other if there's an interpretation, transcription, or captioning issue during a live training? ☐ What is the process for reviewing accuracy of captions for pre-recorded elements of the training? ☐ Can you share the name of the interpreter/translator/captioner with participants who made the request in case they have safety or privacy issues with that person?

Working with Guest Presenters/Facilitators
☐ Review expectations for language, disability, and technology accessibility ☐ Share any necessary information about collaborating with interpreters, translators, and captioners ☐ Schedule a practice session of all guest facilitated or designed learning segments

Additional thoughts

Developing meaningful access takes practice, humility, and creative problem solving (Vera Institute and APIGBV, 2019). Because it is not possible to predict what every person using the online training platform will need, having a clearly

identified coalition staff person assigned as the contact for online training accessibility provides a base level of support. Some coalitions may find they need one person who can help with technical issues and another person identified to address language access. Including this person's, or people's, contact information on all registration forms, training segments, and teaching materials lets people know who they can contact if they need support. Webinar hosts can share this information verbally at the beginning of the session and type the information in the chat box. Online learning management systems often have features that allow people to pin important information like this to the top of every page. People are often experts at meeting their own access needs, so providing a way for them to work collaboratively with coalition staff can sometimes be the most effective solution.

References

Vera Institute of Justice and Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence (2019). "Working with Interpreters in a Virtual Classroom." TA2TA. Accessed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=5534&v=H5iGmEblZ80

Web Accessibility Initiative (W3C): https://www.w3.org/WAI

Web Accessibility In Mind (WebAIM): https://webaim.org

Email exchange with Toby Shulruff (October 2019)

We want your feedback!

Take our quick 4-question evaluation survey about this publication:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BHVH2WC

Resource Sharing Project, 2020