TRANSCRIPT

Digital Accessibility Training

The Power of Language & Disability Etiquette

December 2021

Inclusive Arts Vermont

KATIE MILLER:

Here we go. So, again, just to note, as folks come in, please mute yourself. If you're not the one talking, to eliminate background noise, and if you could change your Zoom name to your actual name and your pronouns, that would be really great. And some folks are putting some introductions in the chat box, which so we can get an idea of who's here and where you're from. People are from all over the State, which is really exciting.

All right, Heidi, go ahead. –

HEIDI SWEVENS:

So, as we begin, we pause to acknowledge the place we exist, connect and create, is the traditional unsurrendered territory of the Abenaki people. One of five Wabanaki nations who have a continued and enduring presence with this land, presence with mountains, visitors, forests, waters, winds, presence with people’s relations, with creativity and culture, presence with light.

We learned that in Abenaki, Waban refers to the white flickering light in the sky. Aki is the word for land or the earth. So, the Wabanaki are the people of the Dawnland. We acknowledge Wabanaki ancestors past, present, and future.

And with this acknowledgement, we commit to engage in efforts to dismantle settler colonialism.

Good morning. My name is Heidi Swevens. I use she her pronouns, and I am the Director of Community Partnerships at Inclusive Arts Vermont, which translates into lots of things, including getting to connect with people like you in the community to talk about access and inclusion with the arts.

For access purposes, I'll do a visual description of myself in surroundings. I have blue eyes and pale skin with short brown hair. Today, I am wearing a green turtleneck and a plaid flannel, behind me is an abstract rectangular, colorful paging against a whitish wall. And I am thrilled to be here. So, grateful to welcome all of you into this Zoom space. And I hope that for this time we can sort of set aside whatever we can to be present to the content and the questions, knowing that we try to prioritize people over time as best we can. And we've kind of cultivated an agenda today that will bring us through the content, make space for questions.

And also we'll have some time next week for open office hours, if there's other questions that come. So, thanks for being here and I'm gonna pass it over to Katie for her introduction and remarks.

KATIE MILLER:
Thanks Heidi.

Hi, everyone. I'm Katie Miller. I'm the Executive Director at Inclusive Arts Vermont, I use she her pronouns and I am a very pale skinned woman with freckles and blue eyes and brown and silver hair, and big black glasses and pink headphones. And I'm wearing a black t-shirt within, what color is this? oatmeal colored cardigan on top of it.

And I'm in my bedroom, which has sort of grayish blue walls and chunky white trim and a white door. And I have a potted plants and picture frames over one shoulder. So, I just wanna start by telling you all what we tell our staff and what we tell volunteers of how we start every meeting at Inclusive Arts Vermont of any kind. And that's to remind you all that we are all human beings first. And everything else second, third, 4th, 5th. So, if you need to take care of your biological needs, get up and stretch, get a drink of water, be joined by tiny people or animals or whatever. That's totally fine. And we encourage you to just show up in whatever way is best for you. Today you can have your video on or off. You can use the raise hand feature or, physically like visually raise your hand. And I'll do my best to try to catch it, there's a lot of us in here today. So, if I miss it, just get my attention some way, you know, we welcome participant in the chat and out loud, just be here in whatever way is meaningful for you.

It's really helpful for access purposes. If you can give a very short verbal description of yourself and your surroundings, just like Heidi and I did, the first time you speak that way everybody knows, who you are and what you look like. And a quick note that today's session will be recorded. So, if you don't want your image on the recording, you can turn your video off and that recording should be available on the Arts Councils website sometime next week, hopefully, maybe the week after. And it will also have the full transcript and a transcript of the chat as well.

But I think that's all the housekeeping. I'm gonna keep letting people in and pass it over to Heidi.

HEIDI SWEVENS:

Great, thanks Katie.

KATIE MILLER:

And for the folks that joined us, we were putting, just who we are and what organization we're from, or you know, where in the state we're from in the chat. And there's some conversation going back and forth, which is great. And I made a note that you can put questions in the chat box, or you can also text them to me. And my number is in the chat box. If that's an easier way to get that information to me, for you.

HEIDI SWEVENS:

- Great, thank you and welcome to those people who've just joined us. I wanna circle back and say on something that wasn't in a chat boxer or will be in the chat box. We have auto-captioning happening today. And we learned that it does not always, if ever get the spelling of indigenous languages, correct. So, we put the correct spelling of Abenaki and Wabanaki in the chat box, along with a resource to learn more about Vermont Abenaki Artists Association with their website. So, that is in the chat box as well.

It sounds like the chat box is really active today, which is awesome. For access purposes, Katie mentioned the transcript going, and Katie will also intermittently read from the chat box. It is not
accessible to all people. It is just one way to provide multiple ways for the communication to happen. And if there's a lot going on today, that'll be great. If we don't get to it within this hour, it will be recorded and we'll come back to it. So, know that as well.

And now we're gonna start with a content. We like to engage you and bring you into this space. So, today we invite you to think about what comes to mind when you hear the word water, and this can be a chat box entry. If you're ready, Katie, and or you can raise your hand, speak out loud, we'll go through a few of the things with water, just sort of an opening exercise. What comes to mind when you hear the word water?

Do we have anyone?

KATIE MILLER:

I was putting the prompt in there.

So, we have soothing, flowing, sounds, wet, cleanliness, rushing, quenching thirst, life, liquid, habitat, fluid, patient, life, swimming, life.

HEIDI SWEVENS:

Great. I'm gonna pause, does anyone, I heard one voice out loud. Does anybody else wanna speak with the microphone or the video, what comes to mind when you hear the word water?

KATIE MILLER:

Meghan just shared it in the chat, maybe because of it being my childbearing years, but water breaking, same Meghan.

HEIDI SWEVENS:

Great, anyone else? And I'm aware, we sometimes talk about this with smaller Zoom groups that we just go run a name people so they can either speak or pass because sometimes it's really hard to know, like when it's your turn on Zoom and there's all of these flat screens and muting and un-muting, so, I'm just gonna name that dynamic. And that seems like there's lots of ways to enter, but if you're one of those people, that's not quite sure when to speak. I invite you to take a chance and unmute and just speak at least in this safe space. But that's just one of those other things about accessibility and digital formats. That's the in-person ways of communicating. It's just different. So, I like to name that so people can be like, hmm, yeah.

KATIE MILLER:

Oliver has his hand up.

HEIDI SWEVENS:

Go ahead thank you.

OLIVER:
My name's Oliver. I'm here in a kitchen with lots of shelving behind me. And it's very light. I was just gonna say that right behind me or right in front of me rather, there are a bunch of plants that are not looking so happy. So, when I heard the word water, it made me wanna stand up and go water them.

HEIDI SWEVENS:
Thanks, Oliver. Well, and thank you everybody for contributing listening. We start with this exercise often when we talk about the power of language, because water is one word, five letters, and the first time a colleague and I did this exercise, was experimental. And 14 people in the room, maybe it ranged from refreshing, calming. Some of the things that were said here. And then one person from across the room said, fear of drowning. So, one word, five letters can evoke such a wide array of meaning and thoughts. And here we had water breaking, water the plant, calming.

So, we just wanted to start today with kind of entering the power of language through a fairly universal common word, and just have that start this conversation about the power of language and words, and then kind of communication. That is about the words and also the process.

So, thanks for that. And Katie, I'm gonna pass it over to you now.

KATIE MILLER:
Great, thanks Heidi. I just wanna add one more that came in, which was Darlene said Helen Keller, which makes me think of the miracle worker. Okay. So, I am going to jump right into it, and I just would love to see either a raise of hands, or you could put like a thumbs up emoji in the chat, or, however you wanna indicate who here has heard of either person first or identity first language?

GUEST:
Yes, I'm actually doing, I'm actually doing a class on a certification on Therapeutic Recreation. And my terminology that I keep hearing throughout it is person first. And I think it's just, I think it's a really, really just great way of just trying to treat people with disabilities with just, I think the respect that they should have, I have a disability. So, I think also just trying to just kind of just break this cycle of conveyable with them, of what, you know, there can be a lot that can go on whether, intentional knowing or not, but often unintentional maybe 90 something percent of the time.

KATIE MILLER:
Totally, thanks so much, Meghan.

So, person first language has been around since the '70s, '80s. And what it is is it's a way of talking about disability that quite literally puts the person first. So, you would say person with disabilities, if you're gonna use identity first language, it does the opposite of that. So, instead of a person with disabilities, you would say, disabled person, I would say neither of these are new, person first language has been used much more commonly for the past. Oh, I don't know. 30 ish years, in the disability field and in the disability community by different groups. I'm gonna share for someone to let this person in, and then I'm gonna share a slide really quick. Hopefully everyone can see this.

Here we go. There we go. Okay, so this is a slide, it's sort of a sage green slide with white text. And on the left hand side, there's a column and it says person first. And then there's a circle in the center with a dashed line that says versus, and then on the right hand side, it says identity first. So, on the left hand
side, these are just some examples of person first versus identity first language. It says I'm a person with a disability versus the identity first version is I am disabled person. Person first language would be, I'm a person with blindness versus I am blind. And then person first language, on the left is, I'm a person with autism versus I am autistic. Now this last example is actually a really important one because there is a bit of a movement happening, particularly in the disability justice world and social media and different services like circles online.

There’s a push towards identity first language within some subsets of the disability community. And this is where for the first time today. And we're probably gonna say it a lot. I'm gonna tell you that language is nuanced. It is complicated. It is ever evolving and people have their own preferences about it. So, while disability, the disability community has been using person first language for a long time. There are some groups within the disability community that prefer identity first language and some that don't. And the question is, how do you know which one to use?

So, the autism community is a great one, and are a great example of this, this graphic has a white background and gray text and a drawing of two gray stick figures. And on the left, it says a person with autism and the graphic underneath is a stick figure of a person holding a bag. And inside the bag it's colored with a rainbow gradient. And on the right hand side, it says autistic person. And instead of them holding a bag, the inside of their head is filled with that rainbow gradient. So, in the autism community, again, this is not everybody, everyone has their own preferences. Some people still prefer person first language, but there's a movement happening asking for a shift towards identity first language. When speaking about autism specifically, and where that comes from is because folks feel like autism is a part of their neurology. It is how they are wired. It's part of their very being and many folks with autism say, you know, me being autistic is just as much part of me as being humanist, and to so say I'm a person with autism, instead of saying, I'm an autistic person, negates my experience or a huge part of my identity.

The last thing I'll show you, is this photograph. This is where we talk about this a lot a little bit. So, this photograph is a color photograph it's of two children playing in the leaves. There's one on the ground that you can't see their face. That's a toddler. And the one on the left is throwing the leaves up in the air. And she has this huge grid on her face. She was really pale skin, long white hair. She's wearing a Ghostbusters t-shirt and some black tie-dye leggings. And I will tell you that these are my children.

So, the one standing and throwing the leaves and the big smile is Maggie. Maggie is my incredible, awesome, just like amazing four and a half year old. Maggie is also autistic, and Maggie was born with a genetic condition called albinism, which means she doesn’t produce pigment in her hair, skin or retina. That's why she has that beautiful white hair. And she has grayish violet eyes and very fair skin. So, in the autism community, they prefer identity first language, right? But in the albinism community, they still largely prefer person first language... there's even an acronym PWA, which is Person With Albinism. So, we refer to Maggie as an autistic person with albinism.

And I say that not to confuse you, but to give you a real life example of how language can shift and change, depending on the moment, depending on the person and a little bit, that's a little bit of the difference between identity first versus person, first language.

And I think that’s it. Before I move on. Does anybody have any questions about person first versus identity first? I should address the thing. The question we usually get is okay, Katie. So, which one do we
use as an organization? We tell people, if you wanna use person first language, that's great. And that's a
great place to start as an organization ourselves at Inclusive Arts Vermont, we largely still use person
first language.

There are some instances, especially if we're talking about specific communities that have voiced a
specific preference on language that we use the language that they have chosen to identify themselves
and listened to their feedback. So, there are some places in which we use identity first language, like the
title of this training series.

Okay, that's person first versus identity first. Your turn Heidi.

HEIDI SWEVENS:

Thank you. So, I'm gonna talk about the word disability itself.

And in the first session, we kind of went into a deep explorative dive around that. I'm gonna go to bullet
points now, surprise, surprise.

And I hope on some level, what we're communicating is that there's not a lot of black and white.

I mean, there's some black and white and there's shades of gray. And we wanna give you both the
background and the tools to think through for yourself and for the organizations that you're with the
arts and cultural organizations that you're with, how to have these conversations. Because as Katie was
saying, it's not a yes or no globally, it's sort of a yes or no moment-by-moment, person-by-person. And
we often suggest if you don't know the answer, ask the person or the organization, if you can. And then
if not have a series of things to think through.

So, here's some bullet point kind of what ifs, around the word disability.

And the first one is what if the word disability wasn't perceived as negative?

Let that one sit for a minute. What if, quote, disability wasn't negative, and I'm putting my hands up for
air quotes around this, sort of the understanding from the semantics, dis is seen as sort of negative and
a world with polarities, but what if it wasn't negative?

And I think, you know, when we get to invisible disabilities, we start to talk about, we wouldn't have to
nuance things so much if we just understood that disability wasn't negative in and of itself, that, that
wasn't sort of an immediate comparison.

So, the second thing around the word disability and the language of disability is that what we try to do in
Inclusive Arts Vermont to ordinary it up. And what that means is because we believe that disability isn't
negative in and of itself, that we can just say the word that disability is not air quotes, bad word, or, you
know, you don't have to tip toe around it, even though I will share and complete transparency.

When I first had experienced with a disability, I was using every single word, but disability to identify,
because I thought it was negative, was internalized ableism. There's still threads. There's still roots of it.
It's really in our world and in our culture. So, we're using the word disability to ordinary it up as
something that is outside positive or negative. It's an experience and people can name it for themselves.
Oh, go ahead. There's somebody who's adding.

GUEST:

This is Meghan. I have input, adding kind of on to what you saying. I think then it kind of can be, it can definitely kind of be balanced enact, and obviously not everyone is ableist, but I do think that there is a lot of that kind of going on in our society. And I do think that, this would not happen to tip toe, learn the word of that. I do think that, I mean, I used that actually yesterday when trying to just inform my parents. I think that my parents, I love him to death, but I think sometimes maybe it comes from just a generational thing for the most part that maybe not necessarily a will, but so kind of saying, hey, you kind of being ableist right now, but then the one person was kind of saying, well, you shouldn't really talk about that, but talk about that, that can get away from the issue, but then I was saying, well, it is kind of part of the issue. I mean that, with something that can happen, but then there's the issue itself too.

HEIDI SWEVENS:

Yeah, thank you, Meghan. Yeah, thank you. And the way to ordinary it up is to make it so that's not undiscussable. And that will link to later on accommodation requests, when people asked for assistance, things that are protected by law, that the word disability, the more familiar and comfortable we can get with that, the more we can have those conversations around access and inclusion within our organizations, and within our personal worlds. I do want to just do a quick hand check, thumb check for those. Has anybody felt uncomfortable with the word disability ever?

And you know, like you don't have to share, but I'm just inviting people to, and Katie is there.

KATIE MILLER:

Yeah some people say no from what I can see with people who have their screens on, there's quite a few like thumbs up, hands up, like head nods.

HEIDI SWEVENS:

Yeah. So, I also just wanna ordinary up that it's uncomfortable sometimes and that's part of our work. So, what if disability wasn't negative, we wanna ordinary it up. And then there's a disability pride movement, which again, is in the spirit of thinking outside the sort of binaries of negative and positive.

And I'm just gonna ball point that one, and then come to the place of the disability pride to disability justice movements. We will link more to that as we keep talking and having conversations, but just know that that part of what Inclusive Arts Vermont is engaging and putting out here are linked to broader movements in our society.

We'd like to think we're cutting edge, but there's also other people out there thinking and reshaping how we engage things for more inclusion and access of all people. And lastly, I would just wanna.

KATIE MILLER:

Sorry, Heidi. There's a hand up, Selena has her hand up and I just wanna see if it's a question or if it was like a hand up from before.

HEIDI SWEVENS:
Oh, yeah, thank you. Do you have a question Selena?

SELENA:

Whoops! I just forgot to put it down, sorry.

KATIE MILLER:

No, that's okay. I just like to check 'cause sometimes I miss those and I don't unintentionally wanna miss anybody's question.

HEIDI SWEVENS:

Yeah, great. I am aware of the time. So, I'm gonna move quickly through this one example of where we as an organization are talking about ordinarying it up in disability pride, where we also refer and defer to individual experience, because, disability like so many things is so varied.

So, for our next exhibition of artists with disabilities, from artists with disabilities, artists are invited to write a statement and bio, and while having a disability is one of the requirements for the call to artists, how people talk about their disability or not, is up to the artist.

And at the last exhibition we did, I was at the opening reception and I had a whole name tag on, I must have looked official and somebody came up to me and kind of pointed behind me and said, what's that one's disability. And the exhibitions are about the arts. And I did have an inner responsive ha, like that was of interest to the person. And I said in that statement, and I'll say it now for us, it's about art. It's about disability pride, but we invite the artists to talk about their own story in their own words. And for some people disability identity, is not the first thing they wanna talk about.

And for others, it is so integrated. So, the MASKED exhibition, some of the stuff online are just examples of how those are nuanced and how as an organization, we hope to support the voices, lift up the voices of others, even as they differ. I think that's part of the beauty of, the disability, community and communities.

So, I'm gonna pause there. And Katie I'm aware of we're a couple of minutes behind, but we. Do we still have time for that communications graphic?

KATIE MILLER:

Yes, let me pull it up.

HEIDI SWEVENS:

So, thank you. This will be a shift from, we're talking about the power of language and words and all of the words that build a vocabulary, but this is a graphic that I hope will help show some of the nuances that are part of the communication process, because words and language are one part of communication.

And then there's other things like how it's delivered in tone, verbal and non-verbal and the way this links to disability or one explicit way is that sometimes people's disabilities impact their ability to
communicate, influence that. And some of the supports and accommodations are designed to remove barriers, add in different ways of communicating.

And so this loop that we have here can happen as smoothly as possible.

Katie, I'm gonna invite you if you don't mind to do a verbal description.

KATIE MILLER:

Yeah, absolutely. So, this is a white background graphic with black arrows and text and circles. So, it is a series of four circles that have arrows going between each one to make a loop. The very top circle says the word message inside. And then it has an arrow pointing to the next one, to the right I'm gonna go clockwise.

And inside that circle, it is broken into sections. And each section says, decoder, interpreter and encoder. And then there's another arrow. And the circle at the bottom again says the word message. And then there's another arrow. And at the left, it says, encoder, interpreter, decoder. And then there's an arrow back to the top circle. That says message.

HEIDI SWEVENS:

Great, thank you.

And this, I hope as a visual element to this phrase, I learned in the communications class 20 years ago, so it's probably updated and maybe outdated, but it stayed with me. And that phrase, that quote was, the message sent, is not always the message received. So, as many words as you carefully pick and edit, water on some level is still gonna be interpreted, however, the receiver encodes and interprets it.

And it's not that words don't have the power or can't be efficient and effective. It's just that there's some nuances. And again, with this loop, the message sent is not always the message received, but the message sent can be as clear and concise and intentional and reflective of an individual experience and of an organizational goal as possible.

And I think that's all we have for now. Katie, are there questions? Are people following this or is there anything that is standing out or? Are people following? Does it make sense?

HEIDI SWEVENS:

Looks like yes. Thumbs up, thumbs up.

HEIDI SWEVENS:

Okay thank you.

KATIE MILLER:

Dominique says, I want to credit Katie for sharing the visual and verbal form. That seems difficult. And she does it so well. And so great to practice this. Thanks, Dominique. That's called verbal description and it's an accessibility feature, and we're actually as part of this digital access series, going to do an abbreviated version of our longer training on verbal description. And if anyone's interested, we do the longer ones that are two or three hours a couple of times a year, so, yeah, and it's a really quick thing
you can do in any digital setting to make things more accessible for people with blindness or low vision, is to visually describe yourself, your surroundings in any graphics or pictures, text that goes up on the screen, just to make sure that everyone's getting the same information. Okay.

So, we are going to talk about etiquette now, which is not a word I necessarily love, but I think we get a lot of questions about what is the right thing to do, or this is why we combine language and etiquette into one conversation or session for today is because we had a lot of conversations or questions, excuse me, about what do we say?

And what do we do in a way that's the most respectful for people? So, the bulk of what we give you today will be about the digital space, obviously, 'cause that's what this training series is about. But we are gonna give you some things that are about the physical world, the outside non-virtual world, just because it's worth noting.

And pretty much everything we say will be applicable to both spaces as well. Okay. So, the first thing to know about etiquette and etiquette around disability, is that you won't always be perfect. I tell people this, and sometimes it's a big thing to swallow, but you're never gonna get it right 100% of the time for 100% of people. And that is because human beings are individuals and we all have our own preferences, and what accommodation or preference one person has or needs, won't be the same for somebody else. And that's okay. A big part of it is just meeting people where they're at, and as long as you're coming from a place of respect and you're checking in with people that's great.

Okay. So, the first thing I wanna talk about is offering people assistance.

If you don't know if someone needs assistance, you can always ask, it's not rude to ask if they need assistance, it's rude. Or, I don't know if rude is the word, but you shouldn't just go up to someone and start doing something for them, whether that's online or in the physical world.

So, in the physical or in the virtual world, there's this new feature on Zoom, where I don't know if anyone's played with this, it's called the Support Feature. And you can like remote into someone else's Zoom and fix their settings for them. You can mute and unmute people. You can do all sorts of things for people. And instead of just doing that, you should ask and some prompts, some ways to say that are, do you want help with, or do you mind if I, or would you like help with XYZ to allow people the space to tell you what they do and don't need, and to give people the space to do things for themselves?

I think, yes. And Darlene says in the chat that it's presumptuous to assume that someone needs your help before actually asking them. That's exactly right. So, how this translates to the physical world is we have a colleague, someone that we work with who is a wheelchair user, and they often talk about people will come up to them and just start trying to like fold up their wheelchair for them to put in their car. And it actually they've been doing it for years.

They can totally do it themselves. And it's less likely that their chair will get broken, but it will take far less time if they just do it themselves. And instead of people asking like, hey, do you want help with that? People just try to do it for them.

And it is. I mean, it's just assuming that they can't do it, which is not the case.

Does that make sense to people? Sort of asking first before you just go in, and it's hard because I think people, there's a gut feeling that you want to be helpful, right? And you want to be kind, and we're
taught as human beings to be kind, and I'm gonna share a link after this. We're gonna talk about it a lot in this series, but there's this Disability Justice Activist Writer, named Rebecca Taussig. If anybody's familiar with Rebecca, she has an Instagram account called Sitting Pretty, and a memoir by the same name, it's called Sitting Pretty. And she has this whole chapter in it about how maybe kind isn't the best thing we can be. And I highly encourage you to read it and have your world rocked. It basically butts up against the assumption that we should always be doing things for other people instead of giving them the space to do it themselves.

Okay, communication. So, in this virtual world and with virtual programming, there are, I don't know if anybody saw it, but I recently got quoted in a seven days article talking about this because they were talking about accessible virtual programs and how, you know, they had assumed that it was gonna make virtual, like the virtual programs were just somehow inherently more accessible and it's true. It eliminates the transportation barrier.

Sometimes it can make the cost lower or eliminate it. There's a lot of ways that it makes it more accessible for people to get there, but it's not inherently accessible. And one of those things it's for a lot of reasons, but one is because it's a highly visual medium, and it's a highly verbal medium.

And when communicating in a digital space, it's really important to first and foremost, slow down your pace, which I think as New Englanders is really hard. I have to slow myself down all the time. I find myself, especially in trainings like this, like, between sentences, because I'm talking too fast. So, slow down. The other part is to be patient, speak slowly, wait for a response. And because not everyone necessarily can get the visual cue of when someone has done talking, but also someone might be via the captioning on the bottom. They might be working through an interpreter and that all takes time. So, this is true of in-person or in an online space. You want to speak to the person you're having a conversation with and not the interpreter.

So, say Heidi had an interpreter right now.

I wouldn't say, hey Jane, can you tell Heidi, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I would just say, hey Heidi, blah, blah, blah, blah. And trust that the interpreter and Heidi would work the rest of it out. And with interpreters, it's really helpful if you say your name first, because before you start talking in a meeting or something, an interpreter will sign your name. And then what you said. So, it's really helpful for you to say your name first before speaking.

Okay, the last thing I'm gonna say about communication is that I love this phrase is to let go of a $5 word when a $1 word will do just fine, which means sometimes we have a tendency to use these like big, many, many syllable words. When you could just say a word that's shorter that everybody's gonna understand, right? I think on an example that I've used of this before, is the word, I can't even pronounce it. Superficialis, is instead of saying that you could just say like good, or you could say extra or unnecessary, a word that people aren't going to have to go to Google and look it up, or ask, what does it mean? So, that's about communication.

HEIDI SWEVENS:

So, the next sort of broad category I'm gonna touch on is, access tips for people who have blindness or
And Katie already mentioned this in terms of interpreters, but to say your name, when you speak, if somebody hasn't passed the mic over to you, so Katie just said, Heidi, do you wanna go? So, yes, this is Heidi, but identify your name and for people with blindness or low vision, that is so, you know who's talking, I mean, it's kind of a verbal expression of the name on your Zoom box and the pronouns. And so it's that sort of basic over time, somebody who has blindness or low vision may get to know your tone of voice, but often when I'm doing training, before the pandemic, I would say, you know, please name yourself, identify yourself especially if we're at the grocery store or something. 'Cause when I'm looking for lettuce, I am not wanting to play name that voice.

And it's not that I don't love you or care about you, or, it's just a context and you know, it just keeps it simple. So, that feature for blindness or low vision also works for other groups of people, which is one of the other things. I just want to say that we're gonna talk about specific tips for one group of people.

Often there's benefits to others, because what we're talking about is multiple ways of accessing information and communicating.

And the more this is within the auspices of universal design for learning, there's more about that on our website, probably many of you are familiar with that, but just multiple options, multiple options, multiple options.

So, that what's printed on the screen is spoken aloud, can go in the auto captioning or the captioning.

And it just, it takes away some of the wondering for people who access information in a different way.

So, state your name. Another thing is to describe all the images that are shown.

So, Katie has been modeling this so beautifully, the verbal description, anything that's shown as the New England ADA Center said, early on in the pandemic. When I called to say kind of how much access should I be expecting, the line from the New England ADA Center, if it's important enough to show, it is important enough to describe.

So, that is the sort of ADA access point. So, is there an expectation that everybody will have that skill and know that skill and do it perfectly? Absolutely not. But over time, the more we get into this practice of describing the images that are shared and shown, the more people will understand and become familiar with a skill that is an accessibility skill, but also for those of you out there who love writing and words and language, oh, my gosh, it can be really fun too. And some of the describers also talk about like the way they enter something differently, when they're asked to describe it. So, say your name, describe all the images and graphics.

And then you can do a visual description of self in surroundings, which Katie and I also have practiced and modeled and invite you to practice here.

If you speak on the screen, again, without expecting perfection, just in the practice and I'm looking, so you name. Another piece that is true for everybody, but I'm gonna include it some low vision, any materials that you have, PowerPoints or slideshows, or you know, arts and culture, there might be agendas. If you can send those materials ahead of time, then people can access them with their screen reader, user software, or again, some people just process at a different pace and wanna see it and read it before it's gonna be in the moment and they're gonna be asked to respond to it. So, it's accessibility feature, again for people who have blindness or low vision, but it's something that can benefit
everybody else. And we try to model that by sending out resources and agenda and accommodation requests, information a week ahead of time. So, it gives people time and space to sit with the content. So, that in the moment they're not scrambling to listen to the voice that talks out loud at the same time, they're trying to listen to Katie as an example. And I'm gonna move along to talk about deafness and people who are hard of hearing, but then we're getting into a place where we ask for questions. So, if we can keep moving through this, that will be helpful.

So, deafness and hard of hearing, what I've heard from others and what I've learned. And in some of the experience as a facilitator and presenter are these tips, and one for American sign language interpretation, digital platforms actually keep this. Again, I don't wanna speak from knowledge experience, but it seems pretty simple because we can get ASL interpreters from lots of different places to show up electronically on Zoom, like many things. There is some timing that is needed to plan that ahead of time. So, for digital events, all sorts of accessibility features just planning some time for coordination and just anticipate that it might take some time. With ASL in the moment of the event.

And I don't use the tech stuff. So, Katie, please jump in if I miss reading something, but when ASL interpreters come on, there is an ability for both themselves and the user to pin their screen. And what this does is it keeps their video screen close to the person talking. And so that, that communication interpretation is parallel and in a digital space, instead of having to wander around the Brady Bunch screen, that keeps it connected.

Also some deaf people have their own preferences and set up interpreter services on platforms outside of the Zoom space itself. So, again, when Katie and I, co-facilitate a group where there's interpreters, every time, we log on 15 minutes early, just to take care of any of those tech issues, to understand the preferences of the people there, we ask those questions ahead of time, but we make space for the logistics because then when the meeting starts, everybody's on the same page, and that's just part of accommodation and having people be first, and also giving us permission to not know every single tech thing that might happen.

With captioning, I'm gonna move along to that, with captioning there's auto captioning, as you're noticing on Zoom, it's really important to note that auto captioning does not meet the ADA Standard. The Americans with Disabilities Act Standard, for an accommodation request, because of the accuracy or the inaccuracy. So, if someone makes a request for captioning, at an event or at a meeting, it's important to say we use auto captioning, does this work for you? Or would you rather, live captioning? And that is in terms of the ADA. That's an important thing to check out with people. My experience is that some people say that auto captioning is fine, and others for the accuracy, you know, depending on the content might want the live captioning. And we have resources to American sign language interpretation from the Vermont area with a company called Van Crow. There's also White Coat Captioning, which is a live captioning service, and resources on how to do the auto captioning on Zoom as a platform, that we can send to you either in the chat box and or after in the posting, before you go emails that Katie's been coordinating, so.

KATIE MILLER:

Sorry to interrupt Heidi this is Katie, all of the links that you just mentioned just went in the chat box.
HEIDI SWEVENS:
It's like magic.

KATIE MILLER:
I have them all up ahead of time, it's, yeah.

HEIDI SWEVENS:
It's like plan full magic. I'm going through my notes quickly just to make sure as best I can that I didn't miss anything, but I'm gonna pause there and go along. And if I miss something, I'll circle back around to it.

Katie.

KATIE MILLER:
Okay, so I'm gonna talk really quickly about a couple of topics. The first one is invisible versus visible disabilities.

Well, here you can just do like a show of hands who has heard of invisible disability or the concept of? Okay, most people. Great. So, an invisible disability is just that it's one that you can't see. So, things that often fall in that category are learning disabilities could be a vision or hearing related disability. Autism is often in that category.

And the truth is, is that, you know, according to the data from the CDC one in four adults, so this is pre-pandemic one and for adults has a disability of some kind, and you might not be able to see it.

So, someone might make an accommodation request to you. They might ask for something and you didn't realize that they needed it. And that's totally okay. But like sometimes that surprise can happen.

And I'm not saying anyone here would ever do this, but sometimes people can feel like they have to justify their requested accommodation because they, you know, it's not a physical one or it's not outwardly apparent that they have some sort of disability. And if someone makes a request, you just need to do your best to honor that.

The next thing I will mention, is let's see. Oh, okay. So, these are our two things I'm gonna mention really, really quickly. They have to do with the physical world, which I know this is about digital accessibility, but there are questions we get all the time. And I think we can't really talk about disability etiquette and not talk about these things.

So, the first one is to never touch a person's mobility aid, unless you are invited to, that includes a person with a wheelchair or a walker, a cane, crutches, anything like that, particularly a wheelchair. You don't wanna take someone's wheelchair and move it, unless they ask you to, because what you're essentially doing is moving the person without their permission. It's the same as like picking a person up and moving them and saying like, you go here now, like you wouldn't walk up to somebody and do that, right?

Unless they ask you to, someone might say like, hey, I need a hand getting up this hill or whatever in that case, it's perfectly fine. And that also goes with never moving their physical body either. I think if you are working as, even as like a sighted guide, or you're engaging with someone who has blindness or
low vision, sometimes the tendency is to like push somebody in the direction you need them to go or to just like move their shoulders and move them out of the way. As opposed to, if you just said like, like, I don't know if Heidi and I were in the same space.

I was like, hey Heidi, can you scoot over a little to your left 'cause someone's trying to get through? that's much better than me going up and grabbing Heidi shoulders and just like moving her to the left, which I know sounds basic, right? But some people still do it. And the next thing is service animals. We get questions about service animals a lot, we're gonna link to or send you a link after this. That is basically service animals one-on-one, there is a distinction between service, animals and emotional support animals. Service animals are covered by the law.

Emotional support animals are not, and pets are not.

You can ask two questions to determine if someone's animal is a service dog, or I think there are service horses at this point as well, but you can ask, is it a service animal? And what tasks has it been trained to perform, to support the person with a disability?

Those are the two questions you can ask. And that the service animal, the service dog does not need to wear a vest or a special color or any identifier that says it's a service dog, but you are allowed to ask those two questions. So, I just throw that out there because we get those questions a lot.

And it's part of the ongoing conversation. Okay, Heidi do you wanna do the last part about making accommodations? I know we've talked about it before in other sessions, in the interest of time, or if we wanna open it up to questions?

HEIDI SWEVENES:

Yeah, let's, open it up for questions. And I know that they're making accommodations is in the first series. And if anybody has specific questions about that, we can respond, but let's skip it for today and just hear what people are wondering about.

KATIE MILLER:

Okay, so yeah. Questions can go in the chat where you can raise your hand and I'll call on you. There is one of the chat already, which Melissa asks, do you have advice on how to navigate conflicting access needs?

MELISSA:

Yeah, so in my organization, we've been talking about how to balance conflicting access needs for all kinds of things. But the service animal thing, came to mind where one person, needs their service animal in order to access the space. But another person with a disability cannot access the space when there's a service animal. So, how balanced that is, it's tricky.

KATIE MILLER:

We've dealt with something similar at our office as well, not, well, we have had a service animal in our office, but the question really is how do you balance everybody's needs, right? So, how do you, what needs, what is the hierarchy of needs? I guess, Heidi, do you wanna take it away? I'm actually gonna pull
up and relate to the service animal thing, Melissa, I'm gonna put a link in the chat for you. That's a link to our personnel policy.

And the reason I'm putting it in there, is because we have a section on service animals, and there's very specific language about if it becomes disruptive, et cetera, et cetera. So, I'm gonna send that to you.

HEIDI SWEVENS:

Yeah, and this is Heidi, so thank you, Melissa, for the question. And I think your understanding or the framing of it is when one person's access needs seem in opposition to another person's access needs or they don't line up in my mind, I try to take anything that seems like a polarity or like an opposition, and try to take a step back and see it kind of as a circle, like what are the different perspectives?

And so that visual in my mind helps me to feel a little bit less defensive about things, especially, one where it comes up for me is I asked for things to be spoken out loud.

Some people need quiet. So, when I plan with colleagues and other things where we sometimes say at the beginning, like some of this is gonna be chatty and talking out loud. And if that works for you, great, if you're waiting for quiet, hold on, we'll get there.

But that's a very basic kind of process thing, not a physical space thing, not, you know, potentially an allergy thing or a physical access thing. So, I think it's a hard and important question. And I would suggest you call the New England ADA. I think they're great thinking partners and they may ask you questions that you're not yet thinking about because there are some legal elements to this that, I don't know how many times I've said this, this week. I would rather be hugging a tree or writing a poem that thinking about the law, even though I know the law is really important, so that's not my area of expertise, but I can appreciate the conundrum.

And also if these are people in your workspace or in the space there's care, so you don't wanna do harm, there are some intentionality that you wanna have come through.

And I would just suggest those two things initially.

And maybe one of the people, I mean, I would be thoughtful about how you language this, but maybe there'd be some compromise within the people making the requests. Maybe there's some understanding or some flexibility within that in terms of need and what that air quotes need. And I'm not saying that needs don't exist, but how that can be expressed and met, might have some flexibility within it as well.

MELISSA:

Thank you so much. And I know that the, so the law says that, someone's allergy or anxiety or something is not, that does not preclude, our obligation to afford someone access of course, but the law does not talk about the specific issue of the person being impacted, being someone with a disability. So, I think calling New England ADA is a great suggestion. So, I think your example of the sound, sound versus quiet is a great example. And so we're negotiating that also. And I really appreciate your suggestion. That's exactly how we've been thinking about it, but the law doesn't talk about this situation. Like pretty much most of the people we serve have various mostly invisible disabilities. And so that's, we really wanna be thinking about that conflicting access need issue.
HEIDI SWEVENS:

This is Heidi. I just wanna add on to that the allergy or anxiety, it might come up around the accommodation for people with disabilities to not wear a mask and physical spaces. Again, we’re taking a little bit of a sidetrack from digital events, but because many disabilities are invisible and the mask requirement, all of things, those are kind of complexities and nuances that are, I think, just gonna keep coming up as we move forward. And again, there’s not a single answer and I do not have a lot of background, but I think listening to people and deeply listening to people can be part of a process that leads to a solution that if it doesn’t meet everybody’s first need, there’s a way to have the humanity of people and their needs heard and witnessed in the process of coming to how you handle that specifically, that the listening part, the asking and the wondering can be a response as well.

I don’t know if that makes sense, but maybe that’s just the heart in me for some of those invisible things.

MELISSA:

Thank you so much.

KATIE MILLER:

Yeah, it’s one of those. We say this a lot, but it’s one of those things where I wish there was like a clear cut. Yes or no. This is the answer, but often in these situations that involves a little bit of, I don’t know, for lack of a better word negotiating and trying to figure out a middle ground that works for everybody, you know, and in that situation, it might be like trying to set a schedule for the space or trying to, have something in set so that people know when those are gonna be happening. I think things that can come up often in the digital space in terms of conflicting needs, like Heidi said the need for quiet versus sound, the need for some people really need those graphics to follow along, but they’re not accessible for everyone. Some people need things like polls and question boxes and things like that. And webinars to feel engaged and to respond to. And it’s not accessible to everyone.

So, how do you make that work for everybody? Yeah, what else? Any other questions for Heidi and I?

Okay, I’m gonna say no. So, to wrap us up really quick, I’m gonna first let you all know, we say this at the end of every training, but just because this training is ending, does not mean that Heidi and I disappear. So, if you ever have questions or you feel like you need to reach out, we’re here, we’re happy to help. So, please, reach out to us any time. After this training either later today or tomorrow, I’m gonna send you an email and it’s gonna have the links we talked about today, and a link to get the recording once it’s up, it might take a week or so for it to go up on Vermont Arts Councils website, the last link it will have is a survey.

And that survey takes you less than two minutes to complete. And it’s really, really, really important to Heidi and I, that we get as many responses as we can, because we take your feedback from that, and directly apply it to the next session.

So, if you have things that worked really well for you or not today, like please fill out the survey and let us know ’cause it’s really, really helpful for us. And then the last thing is next week, the same time. So, Tuesday at 9:30, the same exact Zoom link, all of this will be in the email I’m gonna send you, we’re gonna have open office hours. So, you can come. You can bring a question that you’ve been thinking
about, or like, I don’t know, a flyer. You want us to work job, like whatever related to digital accessibility and Heidi and I will be there hanging out ready to answer your questions.

Great, so thanks so much everybody for this great session today and being so engaged and I don’t know, showing up, being here, doing the work, have a great day, everybody.

HEIDI SWEVENS:

Bye everybody.