

**Guidelines for the Prioritization of AAC Users in Group Discussions**  
**Developed for the 2024-2025 AAC Peer Support Project**  
**Virtual Consortium Meetings**

- We prioritize the perspectives of AAC users. We will seek AAC user input first.
- A discussion moderator will be selected. Speaking people will raise their hands (physically or using the Zoom feature) and wait to speak until called on.
- If a discussion goes off topic, or if a speaking person is taking up too much time, the moderator will notify them first by private chat, then aloud. We can put these topics in a “parking lot.”

**Accessibility Guidelines for AAC Peer Support Meetings**

Accessibility guidelines represent a joint understanding and should aid the process of continual learning and improving together. Accessibility solutions should be treated as a tool kit we draw from, not a checklist or one-size-fits-all fix.

- Planning in advance to maximize accessibility is helpful, but **access flexibility** is key. Access flexibility refers to an accommodating spirit and willingness to adapt to the needs of the group members as they arise. Accessibility measures for one person can be insurmountable barriers to others. Groups should prepare for these inevitable tensions and be willing to adjust as much as possible
- **Schedule meetings at least two weeks in advance** whenever possible. Share agenda, meeting topics, and any questions to be addressed in the meeting to participants at least a week in advance so people have time to prepare responses.
- **Accept that there will be pauses**, and lean into any discomfort you might feel while people are preparing messages in real-time.

Most AAC users communicate more slowly than people who can use speech fluently. Continuing to speak while an AAC user is typing disrupts their concentration and often results in the conversation moving on before they have a chance to contribute.

- **Pause to ask whether anyone has additional thoughts** before switching to new topics. We recommend around a minute.

Because of the time it takes to construct responses, AAC users may be forced to react to meeting topics at a later time, such as via e-mail or a prepared message at the next meeting. This practice doesn't enable collaboration or participation in productive discussion and decision making or sharing points of view. Being sure to pause gives AAC users the opportunity to indicate they have something to add before moving on.

- **Take time to learn and look for individual signs that a person might want to contribute** to the conversation. Not everyone can nod, raise a hand, or otherwise gesture that they want to speak, and the raise hand or reaction features in virtual meetings are not accessible to all. If it's not clear whether a meeting attendee is preparing a response, one might ask something like, “Are you typing?” or “Are you

composing a message?” Also, be aware that mute/unmute and other virtual meeting functions are not accessible to all.

- Groups may offer the opportunity for participants to **share their preferred communication style** (e.g., chat, SGD, speech) or describe their cues that they wish to speak. Be mindful that some consider this additional communication a tax on their time and energy. This should be offered as an option, not a requirement.

Other accessibility considerations for the group include whether there should be audio descriptions of people/slides, whether folks should say their name before commenting, and whether there are specific content warnings people need.

- **Offer multiple means of giving input** (email, survey, chat, instant message, etc.) whenever possible, and invite input before and after meetings. Asynchronous communication permits AAC users to take their time to formulate their responses.
- **Assign a dedicated chat reader.** Many people are not physically able to use chat, or it may be too challenging while managing multiple screens. Participants who rely on chat for message generation should have their message read aloud. Participants should include a note if they don't want their message read out loud, for example, “Don't ROL.”

Whenever possible, chat readers should read messages in order or provide context for the message they are reading. For example, refer to a previous message when reading a response: “Tom is responding to Jerry's comment about friendship, and he says...”

- **Offer support.** Zoom has many features for meeting participants. We've condensed instructions for some of the most helpful features into this document [W Zoom Meeting Participant Controls.docx](#) (up to date as of 2024). Tell participants how and to whom they may communicate any other access needs they may have before, during, and/or after the meeting.

Virtual meeting hosts should take time to learn Zoom accessibility features like captions and interpretation to provide support to participants as needed and ensure the meeting flows smoothly.

**For additional tips** on meeting with AAC users, please see:

<https://communicationfirst.org/best-practices-for-online-meetings/>

## Meeting Roles

- Managing multiple duties in virtual meetings is challenging. Roles that meeting facilitators/hosts should consider assigning include: developing an agenda, managing a waiting room, introducing agenda topics at the start of the meeting, reviewing group guidelines, leading discussions, reading chat messages aloud, moderating discussions, sharing a screen, note taking, timekeeping, providing in-meeting accessibility support.