# Accessibility in Virtual Storytimes

This guide contains suggestions that are specific to Zoom, though many of them apply to other platforms. The first step is to be aware of the accessibility of the virtual platform. Consider the following questions:

* Can people dial-in or participate without an internet connection?
* Do people need an account on the platform before participating?
* Are there any inherent and known accessibility issues with this platform?

## Ways to Increase Accessibility

### **Consult with the Community**

Conduct [community-led work](https://clacommunityled.wordpress.com/resources/) to build relationships with the various disability communities in your service area. It can be helpful to find out:

* What virtual platforms do they use?
* What has worked well for them in virtual spaces and what has been challenging?
* What types of virtual programs are they interested in?

### **Invest in Good Equipment**

Having a quality camera and audio set-up will make the screen and voice easier to see and hear. The most important step is to test these items using the device and space where the program will occur to ensure the lighting, internet connection, and internet speed are adequate.

* Headset or high-quality microphone
* Webcam (embedded or attached)
* Ring light
* Laptop or desktop computers (some functions in Zoom do not work on tablets)

### **Enable Closed Captioning and Live Transcription**

Zoom offers three ways to provide closed captioning and/or subtitles. Please read their [help page](https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/207279736-Managing-and-viewing-closed-captioning) for more information on how to enable these features.

1. Live Transcription

The host or an assigned participant manually type closed captions or subtitles.

1. Integrate a 3rd Party Closed Captioning Service

Pay for a CC service and [integrate it with Zoom](https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/115002212983)

3. Auto Transcription

Provides subtitles. Requires a paid account and only supports English. Accuracy affected by:

* Background noise
* Volume and clarity of the speaker’s voice
* Speaker's proficiency with the English language
* Lexicons and dialects specific to a geography or community

### **Offer Multilingual Options**

For ASL Storytimes, work with a Deaf storyteller in your community and an ASL interpreter to co-deliver storytimes in English and ASL. This fully bilingual option has an associated cost, planning time, and required functionality of a virtual platform for showcasing multiple people at once. In Zoom, use the “Spotlight for everyone” feature to keep the focus on the interpreter and storytime presenter simultaneously. Virtual backgrounds are not recommended with sign language as they make it difficult to see hands. Choose backdrops that are contrasting colours to skin tones.

Another option is to hire an ASL interpreter to join the program. Recommended services for ASL Interpreters in the lower mainland:

* [Preferred Interpreters](https://www.bookinterpretersonline.com/)
* [WAVLI Directory](https://wavli.com/find-an-interpreter/directory-of-interpreters/)

For other languages, you can enable the [Language Interpretation](https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/360034919791-Language-interpretation-in-meetings-and-webinars) feature in Zoom which allows the host to designate participants as interpreters. Another option is to use staff language proficiencies to offer storytimes in languages other than English. See Vancouver Public Library’s storytimes in [French](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEVgx-VUv-w&list=PLp9Du1me5InKH3534Rr-xrNCMAEVsrVuP), [Mandarin](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TaCy4pNkF_E&list=PLp9Du1me5InLoybxRBu2C3Acy-nK2jvDP), and [Cantonese](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkZFbA923ss&list=PLp9Du1me5InJmcHu57GygdC8hknQowVG2) as examples.

### **Provide Reference Help**

People access virtual storytimes from a variety of devices: mobile, tablet, desktop, and dial-in. Consider the following options for supporting patrons in accessing your storytimes:

* Ensure all staff know how to register and login to the virtual program from a variety of devices with registered accounts and as guests so they can assist patrons.
* Create a tip sheet for staff on how to help patrons who are having trouble based on device type
* Advertise a phone number or email patrons can contact if they need support either ahead of time or during the program itself. Ensure other reference staff at your library know about the program, platform, and common issues.
* Find ways to share the program content offline or consider other offline services that are similar
* Send out the [Zoom Keyboard Shortcuts](https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/205683899-hot-keys-and-keyboard-for-zoom) ahead of time (i.e. in an email communication to participants). These instructions are valuable for anyone using keyboard only navigation or assistive technology.

### **Choose High Contrast Books**

“Many children with low vision need materials presented in high-contrast in order to visually process them with accuracy. Along with high-contrast colors, illustrations should not be too busy or complex with patterns that may confuse the reader. Effective colors can also vary. Bright colors are usually best, reflecting the light to allow for better visibility” (Jen Taggart, Literacy for Youth with Low Vision)

Check out the following blog posts for booklists:

* [Recommending Books for Kids with Low Vision](•%09https:/www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2017/09/recommending-books-kids-low-vision/)
* [Literacy for Youth with Low Vision](https://adaptiveumbrella.blogspot.com/2017/09/)

### **Use a Visual Schedule**

If the group would benefit from a clear structure, create a custom virtual background featuring a visual schedule of the storytime elements. Point to these elements as the storytime progresses. Use high contrast images. Test the virtual background to ensure text is mirrored. Visual schedules are not recommended for storytimes with sign language as they make it very hard to see hand movements.  
  
Note: If you are reading physical books the virtual background may interfere with seeing the pages. Test beforehand.

## Shape Description automatically generated

### **General Tips and Tricks**

* Repeat songs, rhymes, and stories.
* If the group includes people with visual impairments or participants who are not using video, ensure that all speakers identify themselves when they start talking.
* Describing visual content that is displayed will help anyone with a vision or cognitive disability, as well as participants that may need to call in due to a local internet outage. Describe what you are drawing if you are using the annotation feature in Zoom.
* Avoid strobe lights or bright flashes of light.
* Consider limiting the number of participants – smaller groups are recommended in many disability community virtual meetings and programs.

## Recommended Websites and Articles

[Zoom Accessibility](https://zoom.us/accessibility)  
Keep up to date on Zoom’s assistive technologies.  
  
[Project Enable](https://projectenable.syr.edu/)  
Provides professional development to library professionals in order to build capacity for providing equitable access and services to patrons with disabilities, an underserved population.

[How to Make Your Virtual Meetings and Events Accessible to the Disability Community](https://diversebooks.org/how-to-make-your-virtual-meetings-and-events-accessible-to-the-disability-community/)  
An in-depth guide from We Need Diverse Books with a wealth of suggestions.

[Virtual Storytime Services Guide: Technology Tools](https://docs.google.com/document/d/149EGA0d9baFfQQNbA2xildCLplL1SUPBUaY_C6O7iBY/edit)  
This section of the [ALSC publication](http://www.ala.org/alsc/virtual-storytime-services-resource-guide) contains a wealth of information and links to resources on accessibility, audio hosting platforms, video hosting platforms, video recording tools, etc.

[Accessibility Tips for a Better Zoom/Virtual Meeting Experience](https://www.deafhhtech.org/rerc/accessible-virtual-meeting-tips/)  
Concrete suggestions from the Deaf/Hard of Hearing Technology Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center.

[Creating Accessible Videos: A Brief Guide](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1t_NmD8R1KYfU6Nuy2gdS-puZHV92HNVEktqF92FeaAU/edit)  
From Rooted in Rights, this guide goes covers captioning, audio description, transcripts, and accessible video players.

[Inclusive Design Principles](https://inclusivedesignprinciples.org/)  
Online guide to designing for the needs of people with permanent, temporary, situational, or changing disabilities.

[Zoom Accessibility](https://wiki.diglib.org/Zoom_Accessibility)  
An overview of Zoom’s accessibility features and issues aggregated by the Digital Library Federation.