

Best Practices for Accessible Communications

During the COVID-19 pandemic, existing health disparities worsened, and it became clear that there was not enough accessible health information available. In response, the Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association (AzHHA) partnered with the Arizona Center for Rural Health (AzCRH) to improve the accessibility of AzHHA's educational documents. AzHHA connected with community representatives in Arizona to assess gaps in education, accessibility issues and generate new ideas to share the important information.

The intent of this document is to share lessons learned and guide others through the process of making accessible community-facing documents. AzHHA also recommends connecting with representatives in your community and researching accessibility on your own as technology and community needs change over time.

For Everyone:

- Take advantage of technology! Computer programs and various website applications offer accessibility tools and step-by-step guides to make documents accessible.
 - What AzHHA uses:
 - [Adobe Acrobat](#)
 - [Microsoft Office](#)
 - [YouTube](#)
 - Accessibility Website Plug-ins
- Provide [alternative text](#) to graphics and images. Programs such as Adobe Acrobat and Microsoft Office will suggest the use of alternative text to describe content for individuals that are unable to see the image. Adding alternate text is good practice for other mediums as well such as [email and social media](#).
- Translate your documents to commonly used languages in your area. AzHHA translated educational materials to Spanish and Diné (Navajo) with the help of professional translation companies.
- Test your materials in the community. For example, focus group discussions with community representatives can help identify areas for improvement, suggest edits, and assess whether the information will connect with the community. It is important to offer a “safe space” for discussion and allow focus groups to speak their opinions freely.

Blind and Low Vision Community:

- Create an audio recording of the document. Audio recordings are helpful for individuals who are blind or have low vision as well as anyone that has a condition that makes reading difficult (individuals that have experienced strokes, individuals with dyslexia, individuals that find written instructions difficult to follow, etc.). AzHHA worked with [Recorded Recreational Reading for the Blind](#) to create audio recordings of educational documents.
- Template and transcribe documents to braille. AzHHA worked with [The Foundation for Blind Children](#) to create a template for printing educational documents in braille.
- Create large print versions of printed materials for people with visual impairments who are still print readers.

- Offer alternatives to print materials. Many individuals use speech technology or audio-recording media in place of braille as their preferred medium.

Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind Community:

- American Sign Language (ASL) is a language separate and distinct from English with its own syntax, morphemes, and other linguistic features. In fact, it is commonly the primary language of Deaf individuals, making English a second language. For this reason, written material in English may not provide effective communication for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind Community.
- To respectfully and accurately share information, AzHHA worked with the [Arizona Commission for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing \(ACDHH\)](#) to create [educational videos](#) in ASL. AzHHA also included captions for each video instead of relying on automatic speech recognition, which can be inaccurate.
- Assistive technology, such as [Video Remote Interpreting \(VRI\)](#), while helpful in certain situations, is not always reliable, private, or used in accordance with Department of Justice requirements. It is always recommended to [hire a certified, licensed ASL interpreter](#) for in-person events, presentations and conversations.
- For in-person events, presentations and conversations, also consider hiring a [Communication Access Realtime Translation \(CART\) service provider](#) to provide live captioning to the audience.
- Some tips to consider when working in the community:
 - Reduce background noise.
 - Minimize visual distractions.
 - Be sure the room is well lit.
 - Do not oversimplify, abbreviate or dilute information. Hearing status is not related to intelligence or cognitive function.

Communication Guidelines (for Print):

- The [CMS Toolkit for Making Written Material Clear and Effective, 2010](#), recommends 12-point font or larger and using 16-18-point font for large print documents.
- Use bullet points to guide the eye.
- Avoid centered text as headings. For the ease of reading, use left justification for both text and headings.
- Use high contrast colors such as a **dark background with light text** or a **light background with dark text**.
- Avoid using green or yellow font colors.
- Verdana is one of the most legible fonts because the letters are larger and the spacing between letters is wider.
- Use plain language. A good rule of thumb is to use words with less than three syllables.

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